Agents of Evil: Curse Accusations and Shamanic Retaliation in Post-Soviet Tuva (Siberia)

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This dissertation is submitted to the Board of Graduate Studies, University of Cambridge, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Scott Polar Research Institute
March 2007

Declaration

This dissertation, entitled *Agents of Evil: Curse Accusations and Shamanic Retaliation in Post-Soviet Tuva (Siberia)*, is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration. This dissertation does not exceed the word-limit restriction of 80,000 words, as approved by the Degree Committee of the Faculty of Earth Sciences and Geography.

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March 2007

Abstract

This dissertation examines suspicions and accusations of affliction with curses in the Republic of Tuva, south Siberia (Russia). Based on a sample of consultations between shamans and clients regarding curse-inflicted misfortunes, as well as on sociological and statistical sources about post-Soviet Tuva, this thesis identifies a significant incidence of curse accusations in contemporary Tuva.

I argue that this tendency is a repercussion of socio-economic pressures principally related to the post-socialist transition, in particular to new patterns of relatedness which emerged after the privatisation of property and the market in the early 90s. My data show that curse accusations occur especially in the context of tense or ambiguous personal relations associated with private economic ambitions, or of conflicts over private property and competition for jobs. If pre-Soviet curse accusations occurred between "tribes" or similar groups, in today's bureaucratic segment of Tuvan society they occur within networks of relatives and white-collar workers. It would seem that even cursing has been privatised.

The ethnographic body of the thesis consists of three consultations with one shaman. I focus on the interaction between shaman and client, and identify pervasive patterns of analogy between the misfortunes of each party. Contrary to classic accounts of shamanic initiation in the pre-Soviet age, I show that the shaman's symbolic repertoire originates not only in encounters with spirits and dead shaman-ancestors, but also in ordinary events of Soviet repression and post-Soviet despair which are experienced equally by laymen. The analysis of this shaman's psychobiography reveals how ordinary events can now offer the triggers for stages of initiation and symbolic transformation in a cumulative way. The shaman's manipulation of the analogy between the client and himself is crucial for the resolution of the consultation and for the shaman's own personal fulfilment. I, therefore, argue that in contemporary Tuva the repertoire of shamanic transformation has encompassed historical traumas of Soviet persecution and the post-socialist transition. Furthermore, analogous shared narratives of psychic conflict and soul loss show how both parties also adapt pre-Soviet idioms of suffering to their present circumstances.

The thesis concludes with an analysis of the factors contributing to an ethos of "curse paranoia", arguing that the formation of this ethos results from the repression of aggression under social pressures related both to Soviet and post-Soviet patterns of relatedness. Central to this operation of suspicions and accusations is the shaman as a regulator of "paranoia": the shaman's performance contributes to this ethos by cultivating anxiety and expanding the client's horizon of suspiciousness in a process of regulating the client's suspicions and accusations of curse affliction; ultimately, the healing process and the ritual retaliation, achieved through the return of the curses to the enemy, lead to the reduction of the client's tension and suspicions.

Acknowledgements

I am especially indebted to Aleksei Gennadevich Kolmakov, Head of International affairs of the State University of Tuva, for providing administrative support for my fieldwork. I would also like to thank Dr. Valentina Suzukei, Institute of Humanitarian Researchers; our discussions on Tuvan shamanism, culture and personality led me to deep and original insights into the contemporary transformations of shamanism. In addition, I was privileged to receive intellectual support from an expert on Buddhism in Inner Asia, Prof. Nikolai Viacheslavovich Abaev (Tuvan State University). I wish also to thank: Valerii Kotelnikov (Institute of Comprehensive Development of Natural Resources), Khimaa, Orlan, Amir and Eres Saryglar, Aldynai Seden-Khyyrak, Elena Khertek, Chaizu Kyrgys, and two anonymous passengers on my return flight to Moscow.

I am grateful to my supervisor, Piers Vitebsky, for his commitment to this project and for his remarkable, unequalled guidance over the past five years. By accepting me as a student in the Scott Polar Research Institute, he made true a dream I had ever since I was an undergraduate in Greece. His inspirational commentary and constructive criticism on successive drafts towards this thesis inevitably led me to continuous improvement as an anthropological thinker and writer. Through him I was fortunate to interact with a number of students and academics, whose contribution to my research has been crystallised in many parts of this dissertation. Thus, I want to thank the "Magic circle" discussion group, for insightful comments and suggestions, as well as for debating my arguments through mind-bending critique. I am especially grateful to Katie Swancutt, for her meticulous and thought-provoking commentary on several chapters of this thesis, as well as on earlier drafts. Parts of this dissertation were read by Martin Holbraad and Eleanor Peers, to whom I am also grateful (I especially thank Martin for incisive criticism of key sections). Additionally, my research has benefited from interaction with: Anatolii Alekseev (I am indebted to Anatolii for imparting his esoteric knowledge on the practice of cursing among the Even people in north-eastern Siberia), Oktyabrina Tuprina, Angela Hobart, Galina Lindquist (I especially thank Galina for sharing with me precious information on cursing, which she elicited from shamans in Tuva), Nikolai Ssorin-Chaikov, Florian Stammler, Martin Walsh, James Woodburn, Jean Briggs, Lena Rockhill, Caroline Humphrey, Nick Megoran, Harri Englund, Alan Macfarlane, Gananath Obeyesekere, Laurel Kendall, Tatiana Bulgakova, Jerzy Wasilewski (I am thankful to Jerzy for his valuable information on cursing among the Tuvans of north-western Mongolia), Agnieska Halemba, Rebecca Empson, and Carole Pegg. I wish also to thank my mentor in social anthropology, David Riches (University of St. Andrews), who introduced me to the study of shamanism among northern cultures.

For administrative and technical support during my studies at Cambridge I thank the secretarial office and the Library staff of the Scott Polar Research Institute (many thanks to Isabella Warren for her assistance with the transliteration of the Russian references cited in the bibliography).

For funding, I wish to express my gratitude to the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, for providing a generous grant to cover the expenses of my fieldwork. I received additional support from the Managers of the B.B. Roberts Fund

(Scott Polar Research Institute), to whom I am also grateful. I wish also to thank my parents for providing ample money for my fieldwork in Tuva and for my studies at the University of Cambridge.

My deepest gratitude goes to the shamans' clients, those few people in Tuva who shared their anxieties, secrets, grudges, narratives of suffering, and experiences of healing with me. I dedicate this thesis to them, because without them this thesis would not exist.

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Glossary of Tuvan and Russian terms[1]

"*Adaargal*" (Tuvan): envy.

"*Albys*" (Tuvan): a particular type of spirit; affliction by albys causes insanity.

"*Artysh*" (Tuvan): juniper used in cleansing.

"*Aryglaar*" (Tuvan): verb, which means "to cleanse".

"*Bazyryk*" (Tuvan): burial tomb.

"*Bio-energiya*" [or "*energiya*"] (Russian): bio-energy; a term referring to a kind of healing energy used in "bio-energetic" or "alternative" systems of healing.

"*Buzhar*" (Tuvan): a type of curse, which causes minor illness or misfortune.

"*Chatka*" (Tuvan): a type of curse, which causes very serious illness or misfortune.

"*Domovoi*" (Russian): a spiritual entity (usually an un-departed ghost of a dead person), which in the Russian folk tradition inhabits a household and protects its members.

"*Doora*" (Tuvan): an invisible (to non-shamans), gruesome entity, which is born out of a curse and intrudes into the victim's body, causing an illness.

"*Düngür*" (Tuvan): drum.

"*Eeler*" (Tuvan): master-spirits residing in particular locations in the landscape. Its singular (*ee*) means "host, owner".

"*Eeren*" (Tuvan): shaman's helping spirit.

"*Emneer*" (Tuvan): verb, which means "to cure".

"*Extra-sens*" (Russian): a modern type of healer specialising in the perception and manipulation of invisible energy-fields in and around the body (plural: *extra-sensy*).

"*Gadaniye*" (Russian): divination.

"*Kamgalal*" (Tuvan): protection, defence (translated into Russian as "*zashchita*"); sometimes used instead of sagyzyyn.

"*Kamlaniye*" (Russian): a term denoting shamanic rituals of Siberian peoples, particularly the shaman's drumming, dancing and chanting to summon the spirits. The term originates from the Altaic term for "shaman", "*kam*".

[1] Here, I restrict citation to the most important terms or to those terms appearing repeatedly in the text.

"*Kara-sөөk*" (Tuvan): black bone (literally); it refers to Central Asian nationalities.

"*Kargysh*" (Tuvan): a type of curse, which causes serious illness or misfortune.

"*Kham*" (Tuvan): shaman.

"*Kham ton*" (Tuvan): the shaman's cloak.

"*Khuvaanak*" (Tuvan): a type of divination practised with forty-one small stones.

"*Koldovstvo*" (Russian): sorcery, magic.

"*Koldun*" (Russian): sorcerer, magician.

"*Küzünggü*" (Tuvan): metallic round mirror used in shamanic diagnosis.

"*Ochishcheniye*" (Russian): a term denoting cleansing from evil spirits or curses by means of a ritual (e.g., kamlaniye).

"*Orba*" (Tuvan): drumstick.

"*Porcha*" (Russian): curse; roughly equivalent to "buzhar".

"*Proklyatiye*" (Russian): curse.

"*Sagysh*" (Tuvan): a term corresponding to "despair"; it signifies a psychological state in which one is overwhelmed with negative thoughts about oneself.

"*Sagyzyyn*" (Tuvan): protective amulet; it refers to a pair of strings, which the shaman ties to the client's wrists as a protection against curses or evil spirits.

"*Shamanstvo*" (Russian): shamanism.

"*Sünezin*" (Tuvan): soul, spirit or ghost of a dead person.

"*Süzük*" (Tuvan): faith; hope; suggestion.

"*Zaklinaniye*" (Russian): a term denoting spells and magical formulae used in cursing and in koldovstvo (plural: *zaklinaniya*).

"*Zavist'*" (Russian): envy.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. The problem and the argument – hypotheses and preliminary considerations

This dissertation studies suspicions and accusations of curse affliction in contemporary Tuva (Russia). Drawing on ethnographic data on consultations between shamans and clients regarding curse-inflicted misfortunes, and on available resources about post-socialist Tuva, I argue that there exists a significant incidence of curse accusations as a repercussion of socio-economic frustrations and precariousness due to the post-socialist transition. This argument raises two implications. First, the field-data suggest a gradual shift from spirit-affliction to curse-affliction as an explanation of misfortune in Tuva; accordingly, this suggests that a field of mistrust and conflict has been formed as a consequence of recent socio-economic crisis. Second, there may be a revival of an element of the shamanic repertoire, namely curse affliction, by means of which inter-group conflict was expressed in pre-Soviet times, through its adaptation to social patterns which appeared either in Soviet or in post-Soviet times; Tuvans may now invoke the idiom of cursing in order to explain misfortunes appearing in the contexts of recently evolved economic and professional actualities, such as private entrepreneurship. I will suggest for Tuva that the establishment of these actualities has led to changes at the level of personality: while overt hostility and aggression are rather absent from the client's interpersonal conflict, I will identify a domain of "paranoia" involving curse accusations as a response to adaptation to these actualities and to the repression of overt aggression. Within this operation of suspicions and accusations, the shaman functions as a regulator of "paranoia". Focusing on selected cases of interaction between a shaman and his clients, I will show that in his attempt to control and regulate the client's "paranoid" suspicions, the shaman uses divination to develop sensitive strands from the client's narrative of curse affliction, intensifying the client's suspiciousness in order to ultimately reduce it by means of healing and retaliation against the enemy.

I will return to these premises in Chapters 2 and 6, after I discuss some data on the consultations I observed and analytically present three of them in the ethnographic body of the dissertation (Chapters 3, 4, 5). Here, I want to deal with another implication of my argument about a significant incidence of curse accusations in post-Soviet Tuva. I suggest that there may be a significant leap in the incidence of curse accusations compared to the Soviet and pre-Soviet ages as a consequence of precariousness to which

the majority of Tuvans[1] were exposed in the years after the collapse of the Soviet State (1990). To support this, I present evidence from two sources.

The first comes from Balgan[2], the shaman I worked with, who claimed that a rise in curse afflictions has occurred over the past decade due to the increasing difficulty of survival. Thus, this informant holds that a deterioration of the standard of living is followed by an increase in curse afflictions. Characteristically, he claimed that starvation and destitution lead Tuvans to curse their better-off relatives and friends out of envy; as a result, the latter ones are met with a misfortune (e.g., money loss) and resort to him for the curses to be removed. Though I do not doubt that this explanation accurately reflects a current social concern with survival, my data – which I obtained from consultations between Balgan and curse-afflicted clients – suggest that cursing due to tensions and frustrations deriving from literal starvation must be an infrequent cause of misfortune[3]. In a classic article on methodological issues related to the study of African witchcraft, Max Marwick argues that witchcraft accusations point to particular types of strained relationships in a given society; analysing witchcraft in its social setting "may give a picture of social tensions very different from that derived from informants' general statements" (1970: 286). This is applicable to the present case, since I did not observe a single consultation, where Balgan ascribed a misfortune to an enemy's envious cursing due to starvation. Nevertheless, in Table 1 (section 2.5) we shall see that one of the motives for cursing is envy. That is, Balgan's statement accords with social reality in at least one sense, the perception of envy in people's relations.

The above suggests that Balgan's theory of a significant incidence of cursing due to starvation is an exaggerated representation of the socio-economic pressures, which Tuvans are currently experiencing. Certainly, the fear of destitution, and perhaps even of starvation, is a reality for many Tuvans; such strains may evoke envy of others' wealth or social status and may lead to cursing. But I think that this statement is rather a rhetorical device than a literal representation of a society as starving to death; starvation was probably more widespread in pre-Soviet times than nowadays[4]. In other words, it is an

[1] Unless otherwise mentioned, by "Tuvans" I shall be referring to all nationalities of Tuva throughout this thesis. For detailed information on the ethnic composition of Tuva, see next section.
[2] Names of informants have been changed throughout this thesis, apart from Balgan's first name, Kara-ool, which cannot be changed, because, as we shall see (section 1.6), it is synonymous with his shamanic faculty of retaliation. The name Balgan, which corresponds to his patronym, is also a pseudonym.
[3] See section 2.5, where I present the range of the consultations between Balgan and his clients.
[4] See Zorbas 2001, for a review of subsistence and scarcity among traditional communities of Siberia and Arctic America.

overstatement of a real condition (yet, as I shall show, it stands for a wider field of poverty and precariousness owing to socio-economic crisis and the danger of bankruptcy in the post-Soviet age[5]). As probably happens with all informants, Balgan's representation of his society is partial and biased, because it is conditioned by his personal inclinations and preoccupations[6]. In a stimulating discussion of representation in ethnography, Obeyesekere points out that informants share our contentious nature as scholars: they employ personal theories or conceptions to understand social processes and engage in controversies with their fellows regarding social issues. This renders unrealistic the ethnographer's presentation of a unitary "native point of view" (1990: 219 ff.). My defence against the danger of ethnographic distortion resulting from founding my analysis on Balgan's theory of starvation is a holistic perspective based on my data: an exposition of the range of social contexts in which curse accusations occur (Table 1), according to Marwick's aforementioned argument. In working out the ethnography of the social tensions leading to curse accusations, this Table permits us to approach his "starvation-theory" as one of a number of diverse interpretations of misfortune, which he employs for each of his clients, or else as an analytical construct or "an ideal type" in Obeyesekere's terminology (1990: 220-21), which Balgan uses toward a phenomenological description of his social reality.

The second kind of evidence to support my suggestion of a recent increase in curse accusations is derived from the literature of Tuvan shamanism. To the best of my knowledge, any reference to illness or misfortune caused by curses is strikingly absent from this literature. Briefly stated, the shamans of pre-Soviet times (until the early 20s) ascribed illness and misfortune mainly to soul-loss or spirit-intrusion (Kenin-Lopsan 1987: 28, 1999: 156; also, Potapov 1969: 348; D'iakonova 1981: 163) or to transgression of traditional norms and religious edicts, such as crossing a forbidden passage or defiling the sacred water, *arzhaan*, which is used in rituals (Kenin-Lopsan 1987: 92, 1995: 217, 1999: 163). The only references I found to curses were two stories about shamans cursing a cattle thief (Kenin-Lopsan 2002: 146-147) and a Soviet official respectively[7], as well as two incantations which shamans performed to destroy their rival shamans (Kenin-Lopsan 1995: 79-82). One could object that this absence may be due to a failure of the above-quoted ethnographers to record the phenomenon. Yet it is hardly believable that a novice

[5] See sections 1.3, 3.8, and 3.9.
[6] See section 1.8, where I speculate on the motivational origins of his preoccupation with starvation.
[7] I present the latter in section 4.4.

in the field like me was able to discover in the course of only one year what the experts on Tuvan ethnography could not discern during their lengthy research. Their informants would surely have mentioned the phenomenon, if its incidence had been pervasive at that time.

An important clarification must be made at this point. My suggestion of a rise in the incidence of curse accusations due to post-socialist pressures rests on the assumption that the cultural repertoire of cursing existed in pre-Soviet Tuva. That is, that cursing as a habit of mind in Tuvan society is not a relatively recent by-product of socio-economic transformation during the socialist and post-socialist periods, but it was known in pre-Soviet Tuvan societies – if not ordinarily invoked as an explanation of misfortune. This can be proved by the fact that the Tuvan language contains an elaborate terminology for what in Russian is known as *proklyatiye* (curse). Thus, from the four terms corresponding to various conditions of "curse" (which Balgan will analytically present in section 1.6), three (and their derivatives) are found in a "Tuvan-Russian" dictionary I consulted (Tenisheva 1968). First, *kargysh* and the verbs related to it, *kargaar* or *karganyr* (to curse, to swear at, to quarrel); these two verbs roughly correspond to the Russian verb *proklinat'* (to curse). Similar meanings have the verbs *kargazhyr* (to curse each other) and *kargadyr*; the latter is translated into Russian as *zastavlyat' proklinat'* (to make somebody curse) and also as *byt' proklyatym* (to be cursed). Second, *buzhar*, translated into Russian as *skvernyi* (bad), *pozornyi* (shameful) or *gnusnyi* (vile)[8]; the verbs *buzhartadyr* and *buzhartaar* are translated into Russian as *pozorit'* or *portit'* (to disgrace, to spoil) and *pozorit'sya* or *portit'sya* (passive voice). Third, *adaargal*, translated into Russian as *zavist'* (envy), and the verbs *adaargaar* (to envy), *adaargazhyr* (to envy each other) and *adaargal-bile kөөr* (to look at somebody with envy).

There is little doubt that all these words were being used in Tuva long before they entered the dictionary in 1968, though presently it is impossible to estimate how old they are. The above then amply demonstrates the existence in pre-Soviet Tuvan society of an elaborate repertoire of concepts more or less similar to what we acknowledge as "curse", which, as I suggest, has been revived under post-socialist pressures. In other words, this repertoire existed within the tribal units which constituted the pre-Soviet Tuvan society, though in a largely dormant state; the cases of curse accusation which have entered in my

[8] I do not know whether buzhar refers to the person casting a curse or to the person afflicted with a curse.

sample (next chapter) are some threads of a contemporary outbreak of this old repertoire due to severe socio-economic pressures.

To anticipate a further objection: the experts in Soviet ethnography might argue that this scholarly tradition is primarily concerned with the classification of data, which are collected from Siberian natives, into categorical units, such as "material culture" or "folklore" (*fol'klor*, in Russian) or "traditional beliefs" (*traditsionnyye verovaniya*, in Russian). That is, whereas early Euro-American traditions of socio-cultural anthropology offer detailed descriptions of aboriginal life in a single village, typically ranging from economics and social organisation to religion and magic, Soviet ethnography tends to examine religious beliefs and practices dissociated from their social contexts[9]. This means that the Soviet ethnographers may well have treated native accounts of cursing as fol'klor: as another one artefact of tradition, next to the shaman's drum, to be recorded and classified into a repository of knowledge, such as "traditsionnyye verovaniya". For instance, the two stories of shamanic curses (see above), which I found in the compilation "Myths of Tuvan shamans" written by Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, a Tuvan ethnographer, were classified into such a categorical unit, "*Koren' proiskhozhdeniya shamanov*" ("Root of the origin [descent] of shamans", in Russian). This is a context which has nothing to do with the theme of cursing; these two stories entered the compilation not because they contained information on cursing, but because they referred to two different categories of shamans (shamans drawing their origin from the spirit *albys* and from spirits of the water and earth respectively[10]). This means that analytic issues I am concerned with here, such as the frequency or periodicity of curse accusations and the social contexts in which they appear, escaped ethnographic scrutiny.

Furthermore, one could argue that there *was* cursing taking place in the pre-Soviet and Soviet ages, but the Soviet scholars on Tuvan shamanism (most of them having collected material from elder informants) ignored it, as they considered it an undignified and backward habit, which was unrelated to what had attracted them to Tuva: *Sibirskoye Shamanstvo* (Siberian Shamanism), a scholarly subject focusing on the shaman and his personality, ritual practices and attributes. An additional reason that these experts ignored

[9] Overall, the Soviet/Russian ethnography of shamanism – to quote some representative works – is concerned with: the typology of rituals (Novik 1984); the shaman's ritual attributes (for instance, Potapov 1991; Reshetov 1995; Funk 2003); the typology of beliefs about the soul and the universe (see Alekseev 1984, 1992; Potapov 1973, 1991; Funk 1997, on shamanism among the Yakut, Altai and other Turkic people; Mikhailov 1980, 1987, on Buryat shamanism; Anisimov 1958, 1959, on Evenk shamanism; Smolyak 1991, on shamanism in Amur region; and Mikhailovskii's superb "*Shamanstvo*" 2004 [1892]).
[10] See section 1.5.

the phenomenon of cursing may well have been that it reminded them of *koldovstvo* (sorcery) among traditional Russian peasant villages[11], something unworthy of attention compared to the fascinating and "exotic" figure of the shaman and his ritual practice.

I believe that these potential criticisms need not undermine my suggestion that in pre-Soviet times the incidence of curse accusation was lower than it currently is. Even if the aforementioned ethnographers of Tuva had set out to study curse accusations in late pre-Soviet/early Soviet times, their accounts would probably not include much more on this, because at that time curse accusations probably did not occur as frequently as they do today. If they did, we would reasonably expect that all these ethnographers would have mentioned something more about curses and curse accusations, or they would have briefly presented several cases.

I would like to relay a statement from Balgan, which supports my suggestion that curse accusations were infrequent in pre-Soviet times. Based on elder Tuvans' oral memory, Balgan mentioned that in pre-Soviet times intra-tribal cursing was absent, while it occurred between different "tribes" due to conflicts over territorial control. For example, the "tribe"[12] he descends from was involved in such a conflict with the "tribe" of *Kyrgyz* (which had migrated to Tuva from Kyrgyzstan). On such occasions, the shaman of the "tribe" would return the curses to the rival "tribe" by means of a ritual. My post-fieldwork reading about the social organisation of pre-Soviet Tuvans led me to consider that his information could be accurate. This is on the grounds that access to hunting territories was vital for pre-Soviet Tuvans, not only for subsistence, but also because as subjects of the Manchu Empire they had to pay levy in the form of furs (see Vainshtein 1980: 234-38). We can imagine that, under such pressures, conflicts would erupt between "tribes" competing with each other for resources and that illness or inability to find game would be attributed to cursing from a rival "tribe". Thus, Balgan's statement about the absence of intra-tribal cursing in pre-Soviet times, in conjunction with the literature of pre-Soviet Tuvan societies, reinforces my suggestion that curse accusations *within the same group* – and, more specifically, between closely connected people – occur much more frequently in post-Soviet times than they did in pre-Soviet times. This suggests that the context of curse accusations in post-Soviet Tuva has become fragmented and individualised: misfortune is no longer a concern shared by the members of a bounded unit, who accuse a rival unit of malevolent intention; instead, as it will

[11] See section 3.3.

emerge from the exposition of the data (next chapter), this concern has been diffused in the urban milieu of Kyzyl (where tribal descent has no significance nowadays), appearing in the contexts of interaction between professionals and colleagues or of kin-relations. This finding corresponds to the fact that Tuvans have undergone a shift from traditional clan society to a Russian-style pattern of society, based on nuclear family and office (bureaucratic) work.

The reader will wonder what the frequency of curse accusations was in the Soviet period (1930s-1990). To answer this, one would have to reconstruct the periodicity of curse accusations throughout this interval, a project utterly unrealistic for a single analyst. We could reach valid conclusions only by comparing my material with information about the frequency of curse accusations in Soviet times; this is unfeasible, since I do not have such information. Furthermore, the problem is further compounded by the possibility that this periodicity involves many cycles, where the frequency of curse accusations fluctuates according to changing socio-economic conditions. Ardener has made a similar suggestion in his study of the continuity of witchcraft beliefs among the Bakweri of Cameroon: a period, in which food abounds and witchcraft accusations are absent, is succeeded by a period in which the reverse holds; the latter is succeeded by a period of improvement, where witch beliefs remain quiescent (1970; also, Douglas 1970: xxiv). Reconstructing the periodicity of curse accusations in Tuva can be a task for future research; here, I can only lay the foundations for this. Yet I shall attempt a tentative suggestion: accepting that, by validating the client's suspicions of curse affliction, shamanic divination sustains and augments the operation of curse accusations in contemporary Tuva, it could be that the absence of shamans in the Soviet period kept the level of curse accusations relatively low. As regards the quality of life during the Soviet years, this is another difficult issue. Based on comments by acquaintances (most of them Russians), my tentative conclusion – though an oversimplifying one – supports the common (in Russia) view that there existed a sense of stability and material adequacy, which disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet state after 1990.

A final observation: the reader will have noticed that, whereas Balgan is referring to an increase in curse afflictions, I am referring to an increase in *accusations* of curse affliction. There is a difference between these. The first is a subjective condition (for us

[12] Balgan used the Russian word "*plemya*", which is translated as "tribe" in English.

as outsiders)[13]; we cannot substantiate its occurrence in any other way but by the perpetrator's confession. This is rather impossible, unless exceptional conditions operate, such as what Devereux called the shaman's "vicarious suicide" among the Mohave Indians of California: that is, shamans with suicidal tendencies intentionally make themselves so objectionable by boasting of having bewitched their fellows that they cause themselves to be murdered (1961). By contrast, accusations of curse affliction are objective facts. Typically, the ethnographer does not need to elicit an accusation of affliction with curses or sorcery, because it is the informant herself who willingly provides it. This happens because, as Obeyesekere notes in respect of the high incidence of sorcery accusations in urban Sri Lanka, accusations of affliction with curses or sorcery offer a means to express hostility against somebody and/or to displace responsibility for misfortune to the latter – the "scapegoat function" (1981: 108); or because these accusations offer a means of severing unwanted relationships, throwing thus into relief the guilt felt at breaking with the ideals of neighbourliness, as Macfarlane writes for a 16th century Essex village (1970: 94). I took notice of the distinction between "curse affliction" and "accusation of curse affliction" after reading Obeyesekere's article on retaliatory sorcery in Sri Lanka, where he distinguishes the "practice of sorcery" from "imputations or accusations of sorcery" with a plea for turning attention to the former, an arguably challenging but rewarding task (1975: 4; 22). Yet this distinction also appears in an earlier study, Clyde Kluckhohn's "Navaho Witchcraft", where he quotes that certain people were accused of witchcraft (in gossip, not publicly) and some of them were even executed, but only a few informants claimed to have observed actual witchcraft practices (1972: 58)[14]. In relation to this, Mary Douglas draws a distinction between "accusations" and "confessions" of witchcraft and notes that the latter phenomenon poses an analytical problem, taking into account that anthropologists have assumed witchcraft accusations to be false – as the same author puts it (1970: xxxiv).

To conclude now my premise about social change and its impact on the traditional cosmological system of Tuva: my data suggest that explanation of misfortune is shifting from spirit affliction to curse affliction, the latter allegedly being exerted by rancorous or

[13] In contrast to us, curse affliction is an objective reality for Balgan in the sense that, as he claims, he can perceive the invisible (to non-shamans) forces involved in cursing and their destructive impact on organic processes within his clients' bodies (see section 1.7). The impact of cursing is also objective for those of his clients who engage in a sensory experience of curse affliction (for instance, see section 5.2).

[14] I am thankful to Prof. Gananath Obeyesekere, who recommended to me Kluckhohn's ethnography as a work, where the distinction between practices and accusations of witchcraft is made.

envious persons under socio-economic pressures. This means that agency for causing misfortune is being displaced from spirits to humans[15]. Accordingly, a process of displacement of accountability for misfortune occurs: whereas a traditional explanation, as transgression of religious edicts, places responsibility on the sufferer, curse affliction displaces it to an enemy. This shift suggests that the psychological tensions of present-day Tuvans are very different from their predecessors' misfortunes in the pre-Soviet age. Whereas in the latter case anxiety emerged in the context of tense relations between humans and spirits, in the former it emerges in the context of tense or ambiguous relations between humans. This does not mean that spirit affliction is disappearing as an explanation of misfortune. As we will see in Table 1, spirit affliction is still active and holds the second place after the predominant explanation of misfortune, curse affliction.

1.2. Tuva – general features and historical overview

The Republic of Tuva, a country the size of Greece (170, 500 sq. km.), is situated in the southeast Siberian border of the Russian Federation. Geographically a part of the extensive Sayan-Altai uplands, Tuva is cut off almost on all sides by mountain ranges from the surrounding territories of Siberia and Mongolia. In the northwest, north and northeast, it is separated by the Sayan Mountains from the Republic of Khakassiya and the regions of Krasnoyarsk and Irkutsk respectively. In the west, its border with the Republic of Altai is intercepted by the Altai Mountains. In the south, the Ridges of Tannu-Ola spread across the western part of the border with Mongolia. In the east, it borders with the Republic of Buryatiya (see maps 1 and 2, p. 13).

Like other Turkic people of Inner Asia, Tuvans traditionally derived the bulk of their subsistence from nomadic pastoralism (cattle, horses and camels), supplemented by land cultivation in the central and western regions of the territory. The population living in the eastern taigas subsisted mainly on hunting and reindeer herding, while the people in the frontier between the steppe and the taiga lived on the breeding of cattle and horses and on hunting (see Vainshtein 1980).

According to Republic statistics, the population of Tuva comprised 309.700 as of early 1996. Ethnic Tuvans constitute the predominant component of the population, while the second major ethnic group is Russians[16]. The overwhelming majority of Tuvans

[15] This observation was made by Prof. Alan Macfarlane, to whom I am thankful.

[16] The difference in numbers between Tuvans and Russians is probably unparalleled throughout Siberia; Tuvans comprise the two-thirds of the total population. Apart from Russians, small numbers of Mongols,

reside in rural regions as opposed to Russians, whose largest nucleus is concentrated in the capital city, Kyzyl[17]. My impression that Tuvans almost outnumber Russians in Kyzyl possibly results from the fact that I spent the most part of my stay in Kyzyl in a shamanic Association; that is, in a Tuvan microcosm within a Russian urban environment. The official languages are Russian and Tuvan[18], even though the use of the former prevails in the administrative section. Bilingualism (Russian-Tuvan) is prevalent among Tuvans, although Tuva has probably the highest percentage (99.2%) among all ethnic peoples of Russia who consider the native language as their mother tongue (Anaibin 1998-99: 61-62). Another form of bilingualism (Tuvan-Mongolian) is mainly found in the regions of Erzin and Oviur bordering with Mongolia[19]. Buddhism (Lamaism), shamanism and the Russian Orthodox Church are designated as "traditional religions" which are protected by the State (Lindquist 2005: 264); that is, religions corresponding to the two major ethnic groups, Tuvans (Buddhist/shamanist) and Russians (Orthodox). In an informative survey of shamanic and Lamaist religious practices in Tuva, Khomushku, a Tuvan ethnographer, mentions that 52% of Tuvans identify themselves as Lamaists, while only 19% as shamanists[20] (1998: 108).

Buryat, Altai, Chinese, Tatars and nationals of Central Asian countries live in Tuva. In addition, I was happy to find a Greek family, whose members lived by masonry and spoke modern Greek reasonably well.

[17] Based on a 1989 Republic census, Tuvan ethno-sociologist Zoya Anaibin quotes that 63.9% of the total number of Russians living in Tuva was condensed in Kyzyl, while only 29.4% of the total number of Tuvans resided in the capital (1998-99: 20). Though I do not have any statistical information for the year of my fieldwork, I am struck that these data reveal an overwhelming prevalence of Russians in Kyzyl. My field-experience would suggest a minor prevalence of Tuvans instead or a numerical balance between the two ethnic groups. The population of Kyzyl is approximately 90 thousand. Other smaller towns in Tuva include Turan, Ak-Dovurak and Chadan with populations about 20 thousand each.

[18] The Tuvan language, otherwise called Urianghai or Old Uighur, belongs to the Uighur-Oguz division of northern Turkic in the Ural-Altaic language family (Balzer 1998-99: 7; Anaibin 1998-99: 61; also, Krueger 1977). The Latin alphabet was being used for writing until 1941, when it was substituted by the Russian [Cyrillic] alphabet (Anaibin 1998-99: 61).

[19] According to Dr. Valentina Suzukei, Institute of Humanitarian Researchers in Kyzyl, half of the Tuvan population knows Mongolian to some extent (personal communication). A relevant example comes from my landlady's family, whose members often communicate with each other by means of a tri-lingualism (Mongolian-Tuvan-Russian). Originally from northwestern Mongolia, her father, a lama (Buddhist priest) renowned for the efficacy of his cures and blessings, settled in Erzin for many years and died in Kyzyl. Though Mongolian was the language in which they were brought up, his daughters learnt perfect Tuvan and Russian as the result of external acculturation and Soviet education. I was struck to realise that they still conversed with each other in Mongolian. Nevertheless, my landlady often emphasised that Tuvan was her mother tongue and the language which she aspired to instil in her Russian-speaking young children, though without much success.

[20] My view is that this statistical finding is problematic for the reason that religious identity cannot be measured as an unchangeable unit. It is likely that a significant proportion of the questioned preferred to conceal their shamanic leanings due to fear of being labelled as backward. The representation of shamanism as the religion of the illiterate and backward has probably been cultivated by the Soviet educational system.

Lamaism was introduced from Mongolia after the conquest of Tuva by the Dzhungar Dynasty in 1688; its dissemination started in 1755, when Tuva was brought under the hegemony of the Manchu Empire (Zhukovskaya 2001: 48; Potapov 1964 [vol.1]: 235). The legitimisation of Lamaism as the ethnic religion of Tuva was grounded on the establishment of ritual temples (*khuree*) and the preaching of the new faith to the laity, though these developments did not uproot the shamanistic religious substrate of the nation. In the early 1920s – a few years before the onset of the Soviet repression – there were 4,000 lamas and 22 khuree in Tuva (D'iakonova 2001: 54, 1996; Mongush 1984: 156, also 1988, 2001). In 1994 the "Friends of Tibet" Association was founded to foster the collaboration between Tuva and Tibet on religious and cultural matters (Khomushku 1998: 112). Tuva is perhaps a unique Siberian example of a peaceful co-existence, even synthesis, of shamanism with Lamaism, something that is reflected in the funeral rites[21]. The violent conflicts between shamanists and Lamaists, which took place in Buryatiya after the rise of Lamaism in the 17th century, did not occur in Tuva.

The following overview cannot do justice to the tumultuous and complex 20th century history of Tuva, the trends of which continue influencing contemporary Republic politics in relation to Moscow. In the late 1800s, the *Aldan-Maadyr* ("Sixty-Heroes", in Tuvan) insurrection against the feudal regime of the *Noyon* (Manchu rulers of Tuva) had erupted (Serdobov 1985: 46), an event that permitted Russia to pursue her colonial interests; Tsarist intervention in Tuva was legitimised as an act of protecting Russians from encroachments on their property. Coveted by both Tsarist Russia and China, in 1912 Tuva declared itself independent and addressed a plea for protection to Russia (Alatalu 1992: 882). This led in 1914 to the declaration of Tuva as a protectorate under weak Russian Commission (Rupen 1975: 148; Balzer 1998-99: 6; Dulov 1956: 386-87; Davletshin 1965).

However, mass agitation against Russians and Chinese, expressed in a demand that they abandon the country, brought about the creation of the revolutionary People's Democracy of Tannu-Tuva in 1921[22] (Potapov [vol. 2] 1964: 79; Rupen 1975: 153). To counter aspirations of unification with Mongolia and to avert the threat of intrusion by militarist Mongols as well as by Japanese agents, in 1929 Soviet Russia instructed the Tuvan Communist Party to implement a radical program of Sovietisation, which involved

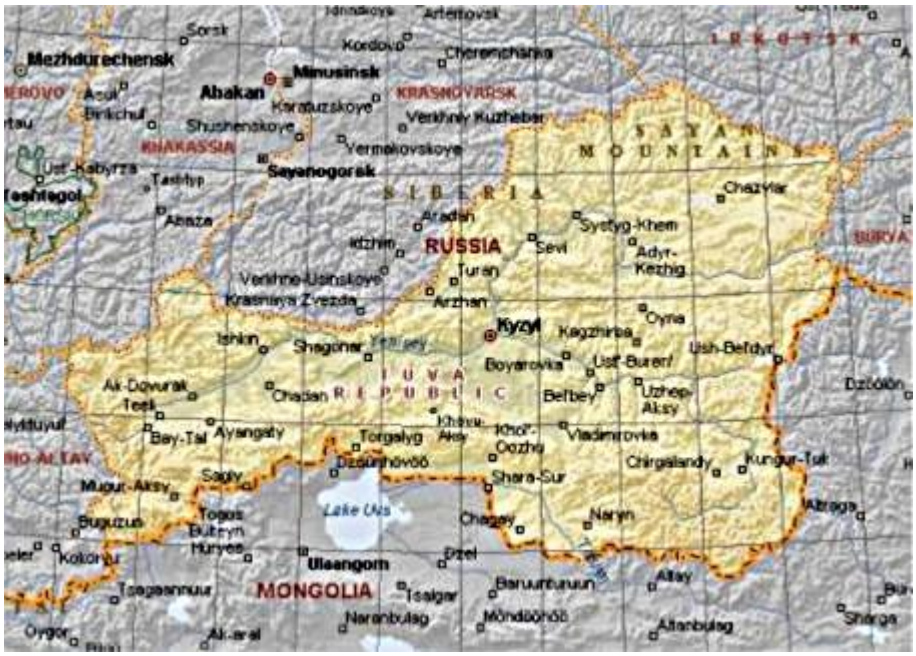
[21] See section 2.3.

the collectivisation of subsistence-economy and an all-out attack on shamanism and Lamaism. In 1944, after a native appeal to the Supreme Soviet, Tuva was incorporated into the Soviet Union as an Autonomous *Oblast'* (Region), and in 1961 it was raised to the status of an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Rupen 1965; Moskalenko 2004). In 1990, the governing Popular Front declared the sovereignty of Tuva as an Autonomous Republic within the Russian Federation, while the nationalist wing of the Front, called *Khostug Tyva* ("Free Tuva", in Tuvan), demanded secession from Russia (Balzer 1998-99: 10); since then, nationalist claims have subsided and currently they are almost non-existent (Anaibin 1995, 1998-99: 74).

Presently, Tuva is facing a difficult socio-economic challenge. According to statistical data (see Goskomstat Rossii 2003), living standards have deteriorated since the early 90s. The average life expectancy is declining (60.69 years as of 1997). Alcoholism and drug addiction are widespread, while consumption of basic foodstuffs (e.g., meat) has decreased (the latter fact perhaps adds a dimension of truth to Balgan's contention that starvation and destitution are endemic in contemporary Tuva). Low salaries impose an excessive working regimen, preventing the population from seeking medical assistance and leading to chronic problems and disablement. The number of mental disturbances has increased, while the budget deficit of health care institutions has inflated (Anaibin 1998-99: 24-25). Unemployment is also increasing, and industrial production has dramatically declined. Concomitant with the socio-economic crisis is an increase in homicides, which occur even in previously trouble-free regions, while the incidence of economic crime is also high (ibid. 1998-99: 58). It is reasonable to expect that these unfavourable conditions would induce intense anxiety in the population, particularly to this segment which has dramatically felt the effects of post-socialist transition, privatisation and unemployment[23].

[22] An unsuccessful attempt to join the Autonomous Outer Mongolian Government had previously taken place. Despite Tuva's declaration of Independence, Russia maintained an "extraterritorial administration" for the benefit of the Russian community (Rupen 1975: 150-51).
[23] See section 6.3.

Map 1. The Republic of Tuva and its capital city, Kyzyl.



Map 2. Tuva and surrounding territories.

1.3. Curse accusations as an index of post-socialist crisis in Tuva

Focusing on interactions between shamans and clients, this study is the first to address an important gap in the vast and multifaceted research on Siberian shamanism[24]. At the same time as making a contribution to the study of post-socialism, my analysis develops a point which is the hallmark of post-socialist studies: the overwhelming sense of precariousness and mistrust of each other or of the State viewed as a source of political and economic anomie, as repercussions of the downfall of socialism. My research takes this conclusion one step further by exploring how selected individuals in Tuva make sense of and cope with their misfortunes. Though not committed to the study of post-socialist transition as such, this thesis engages with the latter process as a theoretical and a social framework in analysing the significant incidence of curse accusations in contemporary Tuva[25].

A basic assumption of this study is that these accusations erupt, because human relationships fail in the terms that Tuvans wish them to succeed; that is, in the contexts of friendship (1st case), familial relations (2nd case), and professional interaction (3rd case). Based on my data, I shall argue that interpersonal conflict emerges from a moral void, which the dismantling of the Soviet State has bequeathed to the post-socialist age. The "everyday moral communities" of the past, based on the idea of the ethical superiority of socialism, have been undermined and, as Hann observes (2002: 10-11), are far from being replaced by liberal economy and pluralist democracy. If socialist ideology was the means through which solidarity was sustained on the grounds that a deprived and even squalid standard of living was equivalent to a triumph, and, moreover, morally superior to Western life, its renunciation has allowed the eruption of pre-existing impulses to conflict – instigated by poverty or antagonism for survival. Whereas in the Soviet Union shortage was put forward as a life-style for its citizens to emulate (Humphrey 2002a: 42-43, also pp. 52-53 ff.), in the post-Soviet age this former ideal, now divested of its purported

[24] Modern research on Siberian shamanism by foreigners has largely focused on the following topics: its religious evolution (Baldick 2000; Hultkrantz 1982; Lommel 1967; Eliade 1964), its role in subsistence (Irimoto-Yamada 1994, 1997; Pentikainen 1996), the shaman's rite techniques (Siikala 1978), and symbolic-ideological aspects (Balzer 1997, 1990; Humphrey 1996; Thomas-Humphrey 1994; Hoppal-Howard 1993; Hoppal-Pentikainen 1992; Dioszegi-Hoppal 1978; Michael 1963). All these studies, however, leave the problem of how shamans interact with their clients virtually unexplored. The above are some representative works on Siberian shamanism in English.

[25] In the same vein, Swancutt argues for a community in northeastern Mongolia that poverty following the collapse of the socialist State triggered a high frequency of magical practices, such as divinations and curse afflictions as a means of coping with misfortune and expressing rancour (2003: 26).

hegemonic value, has been reduced to its materialistic meaning of miserable poverty and decadence.

I would suggest that in Tuva – just like everywhere else in Russia – this moral void has engendered a crisis in human relationships, and that curse accusations, which I studied, are one index of this crisis. As we shall see, the collapse of the Soviet State has opened opportunities for enrichment by means of new economic actualities, such as private entrepreneurship; nevertheless, the fear of financial disaster in the unsafe market-economy of Russia has produced mistrust and curse accusations (1st case). Equally, privatisation of property has led to familial conflicts over property rights and to curse accusations (2nd case). While, competitiveness for jobs amidst a market afflicted with unemployment has triggered the emergence of more elaborate "paranoid constructions", for instance, the idea that the enemy has commissioned shamanic cursing as a means of taking over someone's job (3rd case)[26].

However, if people make sense of social disintegration through "repertoires of the imagination", habits of mind, which could be categorised either as Soviet or as post-Soviet, as Humphrey writes (2002b: xxi), this is all the more true for people devastated by misfortune in post-Soviet Tuva. My point is that ethnic Tuvans have revived a pre-Soviet local repertoire of the imagination, namely curse affliction, in order to come to terms with misfortunes emerging in the context of post-socialism; yet this revival was adapted to the patterns of social change, e.g., urbanisation and the transition from clan society to a bureaucratic society, which took shape during the Sovietisation of Tuva[27]. The result is a fragmented and individualised form of curse accusation, which is consonant with the dissolution of the old clan organisation and the adaptation of life into the relatively rootless urban context of Kyzyl. Socio-economic changes which were formed during the Soviet and post-Soviet ages have been crystallised in the repertoire of curse affliction. I identify the distinctive features of this new form of cursing. First, displacement from the natural landscape, in some cases, to the urban context: the curses in my sample[28] no longer always traverse the natural space (e.g., mountains and rivers) in order to afflict the rival "tribe", as the imagery of curse affliction had it in the pre-Soviet past; now curses can be located in urban places associated with one's profession or

[26] See sections 6.2 and 6.3.
[27] Although one could also discern a reverse process taking place nowadays, namely, a return to kinship-based (clan) organisation in the context of collective shamanic ceremonies performed to request health and protection from the spirits or to see off the soul of a dead relative (see sections 2.1 and 2.3).
[28] See section 2.5.

financial prospects, such as a shop or a bureaucratic office. Second, transition from inter-tribal to inter-personal conflict: where in pre-Soviet Tuva curse accusations were directed against rival "tribes" and misfortune afflicted the unit as a whole, now they erupt in circumstances of individuals closely related to each other in various ways, such as white-collar workers and business-partners or co-workers in private entrepreneurships; we could argue that curse-affliction in Tuva has been "privatised" on the pattern of the privatisation of the market and of the job-sector, which took place in the early 90s. Third, development of a "cosmopolitan" dimension: the Tuvan repertoire of cursing has absorbed the concept of "bio-energy", a basic constituent of the discourses and practices of the popular in Russia "bio-energetic" or "alternative" healing; we will see Balgan using in his consultations "bio-energy" as a gloss for local (although, as Balgan will claim, nowadays unintelligible) Tuvan meanings of cleansing from curses, in order to legitimise his therapeutic efficacy [29].

To conclude now my premise: certain people in Tuva resort to a pre-Soviet idiom of conflict, curse affliction, in order to make sense of misfortunes resulting from the post-socialist transition. This process could be viewed as a revival of a pre-Soviet repertoire of the imagination, which enables "people to construe whole social fields or emerging institutions" (Humphrey 2002b: xxi), such as the tensions and frustrations associated with private entrepreneurship and competition for jobs; in other words, a cultural repertoire which survived not in the Soviet ethnographic literature but in collective consciousness, is invoked to make sense of precariousness and misfortune in contemporary Tuva.

1.4. Fieldwork in Kyzyl

I must mention that Kyzyl was not the only place I was thinking about doing fieldwork. I also considered Ulan-Ude, the capital city of the Republic of Buryatia, where I went in May 2002 for a conference. My impressions of Ulan-Ude were quite good: the city seemed to be modern (by Siberian standards) and there were lots of restaurants. I thought that this place could offer me a decent quality of life, though I did not have unrealistic expectations (my fear was that I would be unable to survive under the harsh conditions of Siberian life). Additionally, I had established some useful connections in the local Academy of Sciences, who could help me to set up and carry out the fieldwork. Thanks to these connections, I had the chance to interview Bair Zambalovich, a Buryat

[29] See section 1.7.

shaman working in Ulan-Ude. The only thing that worried me was the absence of shamanic Associations. I was told that in the 90s there existed a shamanic Association headed by Nadia Stepanova, a famous Buryat shaman, but it had been closed. I was already familiar with Caroline Humphrey's article on the shamans of Ulan-Ude, where she writes that by 1996 the Association had fallen by the wayside due to quarrels between shamans and that people like Stepanova could only be found through a mutual connection (1999: 7). I was afraid that this would pose a serious impediment to my fieldwork.

In the meantime, some weeks before my trip to Ulan-Ude, I had the chance to attend a lecture at the Mongolian and Inner Asian Studies Unit (Cambridge) by Galina Lindquist, an anthropologist of Stockholm University, who has been doing fieldwork on shamanic revival in South Siberia (in particular, Tuva) for several years. It was from her paper titled "On the quest for the authentic shaman" that I learned about the existence of the shamanic Associations in Kyzyl. I thought that these Associations would offer me good field-sites for my research (and, therefore, I opted for Tuva). Furthermore, I was impressed by Lindquist's fascinating accounts of shamanic performances in Tuva and Khakassia, and I thought that I would have the opportunity to observe and write about trance-shamanism in Siberia, my dream ever since I was an undergraduate in Greece. I began to seriously consider the possibility of doing fieldwork in Kyzyl. Yet, returning from Ulan-Ude, I found it hard to choose between these two places. Besides the issue of the quality of life, I had to cope with the problem of language. I knew already that, in contrast to Ulan-Ude, Russian was not widely spoken in Kyzyl, even less so in the Tuvan countryside (Agnieska Halemba, personal communication). I was worried that it would be impossible to master the Tuvan language in the course of several months, so as to manage to converse with my informants and collect good material during the year of my fieldwork (any prospect of extending the fieldwork for the purpose of language-training was out of question, since my obligation to conscription in my native country, Greece, forced me to complete the research within a time-scale of five years). As I expected, my concern that it would be impossible to become fluent in Tuvan was confirmed.

My fieldwork lasted approximately eleven months (September 2002 – August 2003). Apart from rare expeditions to districts, lasting not more than a few days on each occasion, I was based in Kyzyl throughout the research. My arrival at Kyzyl was followed by serious complications regarding the procedure of registration, which applies to foreigners. On the grounds that my visa was sponsored by an organisation based in St. Petersburg, the authorities forced me to return to St. Petersburg in order to register there

first. However, since my attempts to register in St. Petersburg were unsuccessful, I returned to Kyzyl aiming to secure support by a local institution. Finally, the problem was resolved after the generous mediation of the Tuvan State University. After this, I moved from an uncomfortable and unclean hotel, where I had been staying during my negotiations with the authorities, to a good, spacious apartment, which was owned by a pleasant family of ethnic Tuvans, a gynaecologist working in the hospital, her husband, a computer analyst (both at their late thirties), and their two children. They all lived in another apartment nearby. One of my first priorities after I set up was to start to attend classes in Tuvan at the Institute of Humanitarian Researchers.

As a young Greek, used to relishing the renowned cuisine and the mild climate of the Mediterranean region, I found adaptation to the harsh continental environment of Siberia as the most extreme challenge I had ever faced. Even though the extremely low temperatures unrelentingly tortured me for about five months (mid-January was the worst period, since the temperature fell to –60 C; for days I was shivering almost hysterically in my frozen apartment), there was an even more piercing torture I had to cope with: endless hunger. The lack of good-quality restaurants in Kyzyl literally reduced me to my limits of survival. Unlike Greece, Tuvans scarcely ever eat in restaurants due to lack of money; consequently, the three restaurants of Kyzyl are in a state of inertia and they may close for weeks. The art of cooking is unknown to most male Greeks, but even if I mastered it, the market of Kyzyl has but a limited range of foods, whereas sometimes red meat (the mainstay of the Tuvan herders' diet due to the severe cold) does not appear on the sellers' counter for days. My landlady understood the problem, but her erratic work-schedule did not always allow her to cater for her family (and for me, by extension). The only recourse that was available on a daily basis was the so-called *stolovaya*[30] (where meals are ridiculously cheap). There is plenty of *stolovyye* (plural of stolovaya) in Kyzyl, but the quality of the food and the conditions of hygiene are abominable. These are small, hot and smelly houses (even underground rooms), where all of us, squeezed like sardines, queued for not less than 20 minutes on each occasion in order to be served by angry Russian waitresses standing behind a counter. I found the food inedible and, what is worse, I fell sick with a gruelling stomachache each time I ate there. The tragedy was that in the absence of restaurants I would end up trying to cope with hunger in a stolovaya, knowing that eating would feel like stomach surgery without anaesthesia. If my landlady

and some other acquaintances had not fed me occasionally, I doubt whether I would be able to get by for a whole year like that. I desperately needed proper food[31].

But hunger was not the only problem I had to cope with (though it was the most serious one). My body reacted to the harsh continental climate (low temperatures in winter – cold winds in spring/summer) with colds on a regular basis, which, nevertheless, did not pose serious constraints to the fieldwork. And I had to constantly face the danger of crime on the streets. When it gets dark, Kyzyl becomes an extremely dangerous place to walk around (sometimes the danger is lurking even in daylight). I neglected to collect statistical data on crime and homicide, but I would hear about people who were attacked, beaten and robbed by drunken Tuvan youngsters[32]. I myself had such dreadful moments a couple of times[33]; once, while sitting in a café, I got involved in a fight in order to protect myself from a Tuvan man who wanted money. The danger of crime entailed a practical problem related to my fieldwork: during the winter period it is already dark at 3 pm., a time when there can still be clients in the shamanic Association; therefore, I had to risk exposing myself for fifteen minutes to any dangers lurking in the darkness[34]. And there were many. Calling a taxi from the Association at that time was not a good idea, because the taxi-driver could turn out to be as dangerous as the street-criminal (this was a piece of advice I was given with respect to safety). This was one more price I had to pay for my aspiration of doing fieldwork on Siberian shamanism to be accomplished.

All the above leads to the conclusion that I did not enjoy my year in Tuva (this is not to say that I had no enjoyable moments). As a Greek, I hated Kyzyl and I found it a horrible place to live[35]. Yet, even before I arrived, I was aware that I was not going to Tuva in order to enjoy myself, but in order to carry out an extremely difficult project. And this is how I kept going till the end: struggling with hunger and disease, I attended numerous consultations and followed the shamans of the Association in rituals in remote forests, in order to collect material with my notebook, tape-recorder and camcorder; I

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[30] A Russian word, which means: "canteen". Stolovaya is a common type of canteen which can be found throughout Russia.

[31] However, I managed to conceal this need from most of my acquaintances in order to maintain my dignity. To questions such as "Have you got used to living in Kyzyl?" I would respond with a single "yes". The reader now understands what unbearable an agony this response concealed.

[32] Russians do not engage in such activities, even though I was told that there existed gangs of Russian lads in Kyzyl ten years ago.

[33] If you do not feel confident that you will survive a confrontation, there is only one way to get away unscathed: give them some money and they will probably let you go. The critical thing is that they must not understand that you are a foreigner. If they do, you will have to face the possibility of being kidnapped.

[34] This was the time required to go from the Association to the city centre on foot and get the bus to home.

[35] No wonder that some of my Tuvan acquaintances were envious of my Greek passport.

forgot the pain and suffering during long hours of managing, transcribing and analysing this material, a task to which I was committed almost on a daily basis. And I (thoughtlessly enough) ignored the danger of being attacked in the dead of the night so as to reach my informants' houses, while I made a serious effort to speak Tuvan (though without much success). To carry out this project, I went beyond my Greek self. Now, I feel elated to reflect on a field-experience, which for me is a kind of personal saga, a modern version of the "Odyssey", and, moreover, something that possibly no other Greek anthropologist has accomplished so far[36]. As a scholar, I have an interest in Kyzyl and I want to return one day in order to delve more deeply into how shamans and their clients make meaning out of a world of suffering. In this sense, a fieldwork without suffering would be meaningless – especially for the subject of my research.

Does the account of my field-experiences give to you a realistic image of what doing fieldwork in Kyzyl feels like? Anthropologists' descriptions of their fieldwork are usually peppered with pronouncements of excitement and anticipations of returning to the field-site, something that makes me puzzled as to how accounts like mine are absent from doctoral theses and published ethnographies. Clearly, I am not the only one, who went through dire straits in the field, as most anthropologists tend to discuss their field-problems only informally[37]. Actually, the cases of ethnographers who fell very sick in the field render my own tribulations laughable in comparison. I am not saying that suffering in the field must become a kind of insignia for admission to the anthropological community; the fact that many of us had difficult times in the field does not in itself legitimise us as anthropologists. But I want to point to a curious tendency for sublimating the reality, to which the ethnographer is exposed, and for avoiding a discussion of the issue of being thrown into what can often be an alienating field-situation[38]. There are some exceptions to this tendency in the literature; I cite two examples: first, Vitebsky's account of anxiety and loneliness in the grim world of St. Petersburg during his attempts to secure a permit for studying the Even of north-eastern Siberia in the late '80s (2005: 37-38); second, Crapanzano's discussion of anthropological theory as a means of

[36] The overwhelming majority of Greek anthropologists study communities within Greece. There are a few Greek anthropologists engaged in fieldwork outside Greece, yet, as far as I know, I am the only one to have done fieldwork in Siberia.

[37] It was during a dinner with Cambridge anthropologists when I found out that I was not the only one who had suffered from hunger in the field.

[38] I am mainly referring to anthropologists engaged in fieldwork in places other than their countries. Yet I do not preclude that anthropologists who were educated abroad and got re-socialised in another culture (to the extent that re-socialisation is possible) may find a return to their homelands for doing fieldwork quite an alienating experience.

mastering the anxiety that the encounter between informant and ethnographer induces to the latter (1980: xiii; 134 ff.)[39]. Undoubtedly, ethnographers must dissociate themselves from their emotional problems in the field and view them critically, lest they swing in the opposite edge and construct representations of societies plunged in despair. For instance, Tuvans have their own ways to entertain the anxieties of making a living: drinking vodka with friends[40], going to the sauna with a friend to discuss a *sekret* (secret, in Russian)[41], or going to a restaurant, in order to get drunk and have a fight and/or find a *baba*[42]. Do anthropologists follow the outlets for relieving anxiety which are available in the cultures they study, in order to cope with alienation in the field? Or do they recover such outlets from their own cultures[43]? Likewise, Obeyesekere asks how anthropologists in the field handle problems of sex, aggression, despair and loneliness, and how these problems are expressed (or denied expression) in their relations with informants (1990: 235). These questions require a full discussion, something that is beyond the limitations of this thesis. Nonetheless, I cannot but wonder whether my tensions due to the hardships I suffered in Tuva were somewhat unconsciously canalised in a preoccupation with cases of curse-inflicted misfortune, that is, situations characteristic of suffering and disaster.

Instead of being treated as taboo, tensions induced by the fieldwork should be seen as an important datum in itself. It was when I relayed to my landlady's husband my first dreadful experience of attack by a gang in Kyzyl that I understood the meaning that this experience may take for a Tuvan man. My interlocutor laughed, asked me in a jovial manner whether I was scared, and responded with narratives about his own unexpected encounters with gangs. Thus, what had actually happened to me the moment of the attack was an abrupt initiation to the social reality of Kyzyl! (This realisation makes the above experience not so dreadful after all). My interlocutor's reaction to my experience of being attacked and his narratives made an appeal to me, because they were reminiscent of male Greeks' narratives of going through difficult times as soldiers under the orders of a stiff-

[39] Ethno-psychiatrist George Devereux has exhaustively analysed this idea in his seminal study "From Anxiety to Method" (1967), in which he offers ample documentation of the influence that the unconscious motivations of the anthropologist exert on such processes as selection of a field-site and the construction of ethnographic accounts. On this issue, see also: Stephen 1995, Crapanzano 1992, Rabinow 1977, Kracke 1981, Levine 1981.

[40] This is a predominantly male practice, though companies of women drinking are not unusual.

[41] This is an exclusively male practice. Usually, the secret is of a sexual nature (e.g., mistress).

[42] Colloquial expression in Russian, which can mean "steady" or "prostitute".

[43] While in Tuva, I had an impetus for listening to Greek music, such as *syrtaki* (I had taken several tapes with me as gifts to the people I would come to know). This had scarcely ever happened during the 23 years of my life in Greece. My exposure to a culture radically different from my own made me hyper-Greek and, one could even say, desperately homesick.

necked sergeant; the army is the most prevalent official ritual of manhood in modern Greece, a ritual which establishes an intersubjective consensus between all those having undergone it and differentiates them from uninitiated ones (like me)[44]. I would suggest that a similar consensus was established between the two of us on the basis of our shared experiences; without necessarily standing on the same order with the Greek ritual of manhood, my experience of attack undoubtedly took on the meaning of an induction to the Kyzyl mode of life. My baptism into this mode and the relaying of it to my informant granted me access to his social reality not as a passive inquirer or spectator but as a fellow person, who had a first-hand experience of this reality.

By this, I do not mean that I identified with my Tuvan fellow or transformed myself into a Tuvan, something that would be an utterly romanticised and inappropriate conviction for an anthropologist. What I rather mean is that, through participating in a dialogic intersubjectivity based on a mutual experience, I caught a glimpse of how an ordinary Tuvan person is coping with a life fraught with danger. Judging from my interlocutor's above reaction, it seems to me that he does so by taking a step outside his own self, reflecting on his experiences or anxieties and laughing at them. Yet this understanding does not derive only from a condition of mutual experience between my Tuvan fellow and me but also from my capacity to detach myself from this condition and reflect on my informant's reflection on his experiences of attack by gangs as my Greek fellows use to do regarding their tribulations in the army, by laughing at them. Thus, the interpretation of the informants' responses or symbolic expressions is not achieved through identifying myself with them; as Obeyesekere notes, "only naïve ethnographers identify with their subjects" (1990: 228). Instead, it requires the ethnographer to enter a state of mind, which Obeyesekere calls "disengaged identity", the synchronic operation of two different (but also complementary) faculties throughout the fieldwork: imaginative and empathetic projection into another person's mind as well as detachment from the subject of scrutiny and reflection on it from the viewpoint of one's cultural and theoretical presumptions (1990: 227-230). I do not know how many of us (anthropologists) can live up to this ideal. Yet I feel that the "disengaged identity"

[44] See Bannikov (2002), for a discussion of the differences in understanding the experience of serving in the Russian army between those who have served as soldiers and those who have not (in Russia conscription is compulsory, though certain categories of civilians are exempt). According to this, the latter ones understand as symptoms of anomaly and perversion what in the context of hierarchical relations between various categories of soldiers appears to be physical and psychological dominance exercised upon newly recruited soldiers by mature ones. Indeed, in popular Russian perception the army is a space of extreme deviance and madness; for instance, in Tuva the rumour circulates that Tuvan lads who join the army stab other soldiers.

describes well the interaction between my Tuvan fellow and me: I empathise with his laughter and narratives, taking them as expressions of his empathy towards me, based on a mutual experience; but also, I momentarily dissociate myself and recall a similar kind of empathic intersubjectivity based on the Greek rite of initiation, which I use in order to interpret my interaction with my Tuvan fellow.

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I selected one of the four shamanic Associations existing in Kyzyl as my field site. The reasons for this were the affordable fee which was required for my research, and the informal atmosphere of this Association. The only person concerned with collecting the fee was the cashier; I paid a monthly flat fee, but my sponsorship did not affect my interactions with the shamans, who overall avoided asking for money. My relationships with most of them grew friendly from the beginning of my research. To my surprise, they did not seem to be affected by my presence. Characteristically, our acquaintance would not last more than a few moments, during which they would ask a few things about me, and then would go to make tea or treat a client. I was soon to find out that I had not been the first ethnographer to visit this Association (see section 1.8).

I narrowed my research to a particular shaman of this Association, Balgan. I did the same with his clients eventually, in particular focusing on one of them, whom I present in the third case study. My strategy was to probe as deeply as possible into my informants' thoughts about misfortune and the consultations in which they were engaged, something that would be impossible if I had diffused the scope of my fieldwork and collected data from different shamans and clients from all four Associations. Certainly, the latter strategy – assuming that it can be feasible for a single researcher – would have yielded a body of quantifiable data, which would serve better the purpose of estimating the incidence of curse affliction and spirit affliction. But it would not have granted me access to people's reflections on their social reality, such as Balgan's theory of starvation, which drew me to delineate the social context of curse accusations (see next chapter). Likewise, I would not have elicited from him two crucial (and sensitive) parts from his own psychobiography, which led me to consider that major elements of his ritual repertoire – healing and retaliation – have their motivational roots in the ills of post-socialism (3.5) and in the age of Soviet repression (4.3). To appreciate the historical and social forces working behind shamanic transformation, I engaged in a long interaction with Balgan.

I used the Russian language throughout my fieldwork (during the first weeks I faced difficulties of communicating in Russian, which gradually subsided). Yet my increasing knowledge of Tuvan enabled me to understand the dialogues between shamans and clients to some extent. Whenever immediate translation in Russian was necessary, I was dependent on the shamans' professionalism and the clients' benevolence. To interview Tuvan clients with very little knowledge of Russian, I employed an interpreter, a young Tuvan woman teaching English in a college in Kyzyl, who supplemented her income by working as an interpreter for American scholars and tourists travelling to Tuva every summer. She helped me to translate (from a tape) parts of the dialogues between Balgan and one of his clients in which Tuvan was the language spoken[45], as well as Balgan's ritual invocations, which he himself had written for me.

There is a phenomenon, which Obeyesekere calls the "interpreter effect": the influence of the interpreter on the progress of fieldwork and on the meanings that the ethnographer makes of his translated data (1990: 235-36; 1981: 10-11). Even though it is true that the interpreter's "psychological propensities and social class position might well slant the investigation into one direction or another" (1990: 236), I think that the influence of this interpreter on my fieldwork, if any, must have been slight. I employed her only occasionally and I did not develop any close relationship with her. To mention some remarkable features from our cooperation, I was impressed by her professionalism, which was expressed through her immediate and coherent translations into English of the informants' responses, something that during the interviews made me anxious that as an inexperienced student I could not come up to such a professional situation. There were moments when I thought that my questions were not addressed to the interviewee but to her, perhaps because I was competing with her. Another feature that impressed me was her fluency in speaking English, which, I have to admit, sometimes prevailed over mine. She had spent one year in the U.S., where she was trained as an interpreter, and she had a slightly American accent. In addition, not only did she understand my research topic and my theoretical approach to it, but also, she could critically position herself in relation to it. To mention an example, once she translated in Russian an article I had written, based on my material; at the end of our session, she mentioned that she agreed with my premise that analytic emphasis must be given to the patient, who is absent from interpretations of ritual healing. A thought instantly crossed my mind: "You are not supposed to understand

[45] See sections 5.2, 5.3.1, 5.3.2, and 5.3.3.

this". I resisted the idea that she had the skills to assume my own position as an analyst. Clearly, my interpreter was not a passive instrument to be manipulated for the purposes of fieldwork; she was an agent involved in the production and analysis of the data, and, I suspect, her influence on the tenor of my fieldwork could have been important, if I had employed her more systematically.

I was going to my field-site almost on a daily basis. Owing to the particularity of the situation, I came up with a fieldwork methodology. First, I would approach the clients and ask them about their problem; this way I could elicit in Russian advance information about a consultation, which would be enacted in Tuvan. Second, I would attend the consultation, keeping notes about the client's psychological behaviour and his/her discussion with the shaman, and I would use a tape-recorder or a camcorder, whenever allowable. Third, I would arrange a meeting with the client to discuss his/her problem; I would also discuss with the shaman after the consultation. I should note that this was the ideal scenario; in most cases, the clients avoided my questions, protecting the privacy of their circumstances, while some even objected to my presence at the consultation. Approximately eight out of ten clients would avoid any interaction with me, intending this way to maintain privacy. I found this very frustrating.

Either in a consultation or in an interview, all the clients faced with scepticism the use of a recorder; by contrast, most shamans relished being recorded during ritual action. Whenever my intention to record a consultation was met with resistance, Balgan would solve this by explaining to the client that I was carrying out a research about his ritual practice. In interviews, my interpreter (or in her absence, myself) would convince the client about the necessity of recording, promising that the conversation would not reach other ears (a promise I kept in all cases). Happily, I collected almost all the material by using a tape-recorder (and a camcorder on some occasions); as a result, my field-notes consist of accurate transcriptions of dialogues between shamans, their clients and me.

In my interactions with my informants, I assumed a dispassionate and detached status, trying to make my presence in the consultations as unfelt as possible. However, I was forced in the apprentice's role by Balgan, for whom my conversion into a student (*uchenik*, in Russian) was a source of prestige in front of his clients. I did not hold unrealistic expectations about becoming a shaman, though some shamans encouraged me to do so. I tried learning to drum and invoke the spirits, but I soon gave up due to the embarrassment of publicly performing. However, I showed a strong interest in eliciting from Balgan and the other shamans of the Association their knowledge on how the curses

work against a human target and, more critically, what techniques or spells are involved in cursing[46]. I purposefully cultivated this interest due to the following two reasons.

First, I felt attracted by Balgan's discourse on cursing, a domain of knowledge which I considered to be esoteric, difficult to elicit, and, thus, extremely valuable as a body of ethnographic data. Second, I thought that my immersion into cursing, a means of harming an enemy, would provide a unique opportunity to revisit and resolve a personal crisis, an event which was the source of violent agitation for me in the past. A couple of years before I went to Tuva, while I was still living in Greece, I had been involved in an interpersonal conflict, which entailed a heavy loss for me and caused much turmoil to my family. For reasons of confidentiality, I cannot be more specific as to this conflict or to the enemy involved. I shall only mention that for many months I laboured under an unbearable sense of injustice and was convinced that punishment should be imposed on the evildoer. To this end, I consulted several solicitors, but I was told that my accusations were not enough to make a case in the court. From the legal point of view, there was no incriminating evidence. Though my rationalism did not allow me to believe that my desire could be accomplished through retaliatory sorcery, my interaction with Balgan, a shaman who – as he often repeated – could harness the lethal forces of cursing, led me to play with this possibility. After all, I had nothing to lose or risk.

It is only now (at the final stages of writing) that I realise that my case was similar to the three cases, which I present in depth in this thesis: we all laboured under a sense of injustice and wanted to have our enemies punished as expeditiously as possible. But, as we shall see (section 3.3), legal mechanisms of redressing an iniquity scarcely ever yield the desired outcome expeditiously, if at all. Thus, in the absence of an expedient system of retaliation, people like these clients and me resort to the shaman (or, as we shall see, even combine legal and shamanic recourses) in order to punish their enemy. Yet in my own case, there is a special feature: Balgan's specialisation in vicarious punishments provided me with a leeway to externalise (and find relief to some extent from) a long and unrelenting grudge, which could have otherwise been canalised through actions entailing risk and unpleasant complications, such as overt physical violence or homicide. Finally, after I convinced him that I had suffered from injustice, Balgan agreed to fulfil my inexorable desire: we will see him practising for me retaliatory sorcery "*do smerti*" ("to the death", in Russian), as he himself will assure me (section 1.6).

[46] See section 1.6.

1.5. Kinds of Tuvan shamans

The word for "shaman" in Tuvan is *kham* (plural: *khamnar*). The reader familiar with the shamanisms[47] of South Siberia will note the similarity with the Altaic term for "shaman", *kam* (this is due to the fact that the Tuvan language belongs to the family of Ural-Altaic languages). The authority on Tuvan shamanism, Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, distinguishes the following kinds of shamans (1999, 1987):

1) *Yzyguur salgap khamnaan khamnar* (shamans drawing their descent from an ancestral shamanic spirit of their lineage). This category conforms to the general pattern of hereditary bestowal of shamanic power, which Eliade described for Central and North Asia. According to this, the chosen one is afflicted with fits by an ancestral shamanic spirit, and learns how to invoke this spirit as an apprentice next to an experienced shaman (1964: 18-20). Vera Pavlovna Di'akonova, an expert on Tuvan shamanism, writes that during the ritual for his consecration as a shaman, the novice has a vision of being eaten by worms, so that he is reduced to his skeleton[48] (1981: 136, also Alekseev 1984: 137). As he told me, Balgan draws a shamanic descent from his shaman-grandmother, *Kara-Kys* (see section 1.8). According to him, hereditary shamans are never recruited through spirit-affliction[49], noting that this is the typical pattern of election for albys-shamans (see below); he will describe his recruitment by Kara-Kys as a transmission of "bio-energy", a curative force which her spirit passed to him[50]. Based on elder-informants' memories of pre-Soviet shamanism, Kenin-Lopsan writes that hereditary shamans were considered among Tuvans as the most powerful of all categories of shamans (1987: 12) – a position which Balgan often emphasised to differentiate himself from the non-hereditary shamans of his Association.

2) *Sug-cher eezinden khamnaan khamnar* (shamans drawing their power from spirits of water-springs and earth). I did not work with shamans of this kind, so we will not revisit this category in this thesis.

3) *Deerlerden khamnaan khamnar* (shamans drawing their power from spirits of heaven). Shamans of this category are considered of heavenly origin, because they draw

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[47] I am using the plural, in consonance with the currently prevalent (among anthropologists) tendency for conceptualising "shamanism" as a plurality of disparate religious practices and ideologies than as a unitary or universal category of religion (Vitebsky 1995: 11; Atkinson 1992: 308).

[48] This is a precious, though somewhat rare for Tuvan shamanism, reference of initiatory experience, which matches the well-documented patterns of the shaman's initiatory dismemberment among the Yakut and of reduction to one's own skeleton in Inuit shamanism (see Vitebsky 1995: 18; Rasmussen 1976)

[49] Yet he will reveal episodes of initiatory spirit-affliction from his own psychobiography (section 5.3.4).

[50] See section 5.3.4.

their power from the *azarlar* spirits who reside in heaven or even from the supreme deity of heaven, *Khaiyrakan*. Balgan himself claimed that Kara-Kys was a heavenly shaman. He designated himself as a "heavenly-hereditary" ("*niebesnyi-potomstvennyi*", in Russian) shaman, meaning that he inherited the heavenly line from her. The spirit of Kara-Kys exerts a powerful control over Balgan. As he used to emphasise in the consultations: "My grandmother directs me"[51]. To my knowledge, he is the only "heavenly" shaman in his Association.

4) *Albystan khamnaan khamnar* (shamans drawing their power from the albys spirit). Shamans of this kind are considered particularly apt in mastering the albys, an ambiguous spirit which attacks humans and afflicts them with fits, as well as an array of evil spirits (*chetker, shulbus, deeren, mangys, khoza*). Balgan told me that the albys is not necessarily evil, yet it is very suspicious of humans who are curious about it, and attacks them in order to protect itself. Sightings of albys have produced different descriptions of its appearance. According to Kenin-Lopsan's informants, the albys takes the form of a handsome (Tuvan) man or a beautiful (Tuvan) woman, if it comes across a woman or a man respectively (1999: 39). Shamans of Balgan's Association described it as a short creature with an amorphous countenance covered by long, dark hair, or as a woman raising her long hair to reveal a countenance terrifying to its beholder[52]. Whether one is faced with its attractive or terrifying manifestation, encounter with albys inevitably leads to shamanic initiation as a cure against the insanity caused by albys-affliction. Balgan draws additionally a distant shamanic descent from his great-grandfather, an albys-shaman, called *Shokar-kham* (father of Kara-Kys); Shokar became a shaman after he was attacked by an albys, and passed his albys-experience to his son *Cherlik* (brother of Kara-Kys), who also became an albys-kham (see Figure 1, p. 30). In Balgan's Association there were two shamans who designated themselves as albys; I briefly introduce one of them in section 1.8.

Another self-designation, which Balgan often used, was that of *ak-kham* (white shaman) as a way of differentiating himself from a *kara-kham* (black shaman). According

[51] I still remember him saying this in Russian: "*Babushka menya upravlyaet*", an expression, which gives an impression of Balgan as a tele-guided instrument.

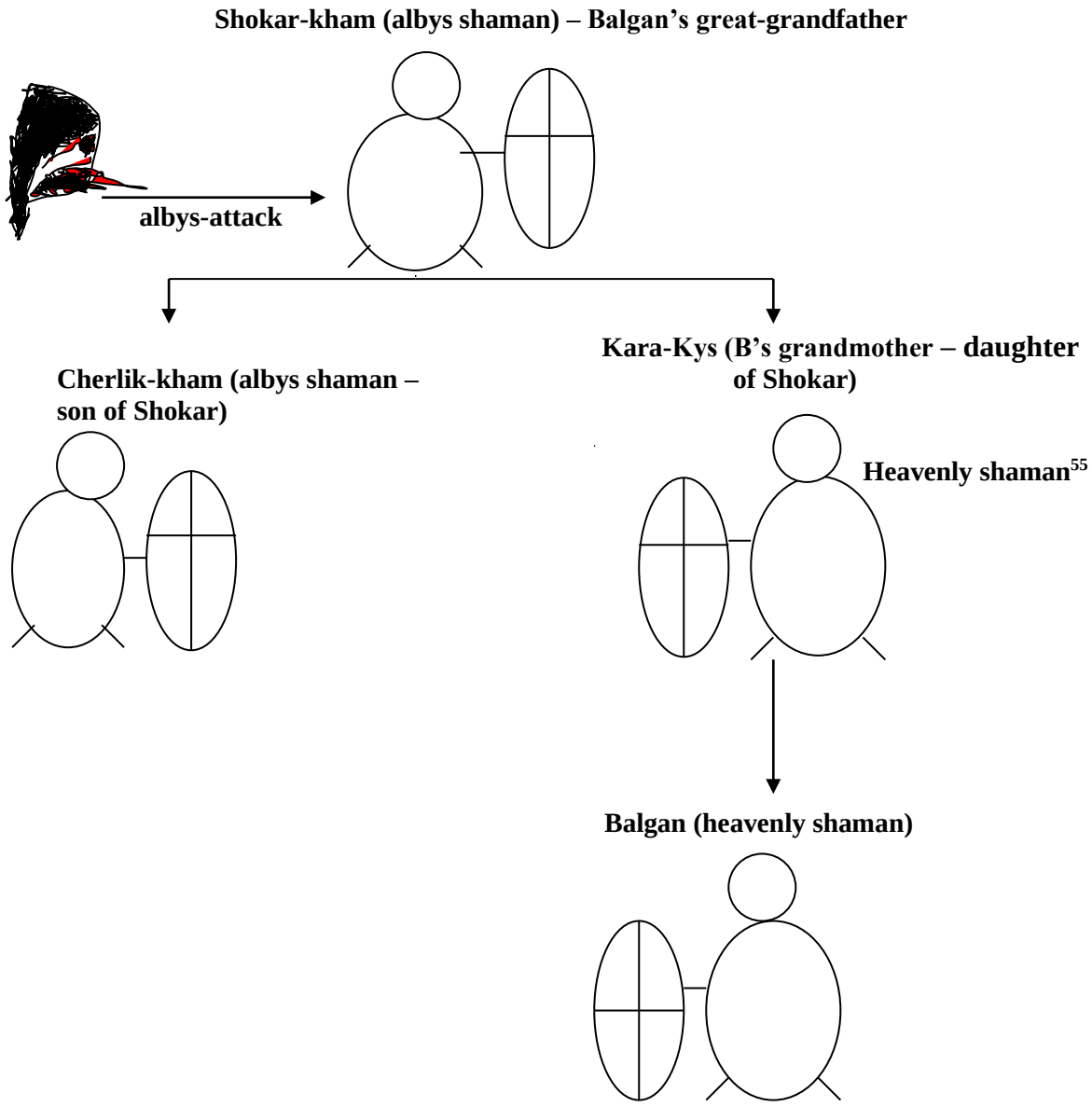
[52] I cannot but note that these descriptions strikingly resemble a ghostly pattern which is very common in Asian (mainly Japanese) horror cinema: the horrifying countenance of the ghost of a woman or a girl, who found a horrible death (and, therefore, turned herself into a "curse", a murderous ghost persecuting the living). This pattern, which draws on Asian (shamanic) traditions, is sharply displayed in good collections of horror cinema as the "Ring" and the "Grudge". Clearly, the shamans' descriptions of albys have not been influenced by these movies, as the latter ones came out after my fieldwork; yet I do not preclude that in the future these movies may enrich the shamanic imagination of encounter with spirits.

to him, whereas an ak-kham invokes the healthy spirits of heaven and uses them only for curing, a kara-kham invokes evil spirits from the underworld, *Erlik-Oran*[53], which he is able to use not only for curing, but also for driving somebody ill. Balgan told me that in the pre-Soviet past a kara-kham was called only in cases where the patient's life was in danger; the cure would consist in introducing evil spirits to the patient's body, for, as it was believed, only such spirits could fight grave illness. As he stressed, black shamans are not necessarily evil and, therefore, should not be confused with shamans commissioned to do harm by means of cursing, whom Balgan called "evil" (see section 2.6). By the latter, Balgan, I think, referred to a distinct category of shamans who are believed to be specialists in harmful magic and to be commissioned for this purpose nowadays in Tuva (I do not have any evidence that such shamans exist). According to Valentina Suzukei, a Tuvan ethnographer, the cultural belief exists that exceptionally powerful shamans can both cure and cause harm (personal communication). My impression is that black shamans should also be differentiated from albys shamans, although they both control evil spirits; whereas the former ones are initiated after affliction with evil spirits, the latter are initiated after affliction with albys – a spirit not necessarily causing harm.

It seems to me that the above classification of shamans into distinct categories is rather arbitrary. For instance, Balgan's shamanic descent involves more than a single category (1, 3, 4): he designates himself as a "hereditary-heavenly" shaman on the basis of his descent from Kara-Kys, a heavenly shaman; and also, he identifies a distant line of descent from an albys-shaman. We should rather conceptualise these categories as different tendencies or dispositions which may co-exist, or even compete for prevalence, within the same shaman – as we shall see, Balgan[54].

[53] This is a distinction that Eliade draws in his survey of Siberian shamanism (1964: 184-189).
[54] See section 6.1, where I argue that a conflict between the heavenly and albys tendencies occurs within Balgan.

Figure 1. Balgan's shamanic descent



[55] Yet in section 6.1 I will suggest that Kara-Kys inherited the albys line also, which she passed to Balgan.

1.6. Malignity and retribution: two modalities of cursing

Balgan distinguished four kinds of curses: First, buzhar, a kind of curse which causes non-serious illnesses or misfortunes. Balgan used the Russian word *porcha* (curse, spoiling, damage) to refer to buzhar[56]. Once, he explained a problem I once had with my stomach as the result of buzhar, which an evil shaman had cast against me. As Balgan mentioned, buzhar can also take the meaning of "curse", when illness or death is explained as the result of coming in contact with a grave or the remnants of a dead human. Second, kargysh, a curse which brings about serious illness or misfortune, or even death. Typical is also the doublet *kargysh-yrgysh*. Third, adaargal, translated as "envy" (*zavist'*, in Russian), an equally serious kind of curse, which has dire consequences for its victim. A particular type of adaargal is *kara-dyl*, which is literally translated as "black tongue". According to this, envious and malign language about somebody is enough to bring about a misfortune. Fourth, *chatka*: Balgan described it as an extremely dangerous kind of curse, which only powerful shamans and very malicious persons can accomplish. When a curse is cast, *doora* is produced: this is a gruesome, dark-coloured entity (invisible to non-shamans), which lies in ambush, waiting for the target to appear. Several shamans used the Russian adverb *poperiok* (across) to refer to it, emphasising its propensity to lie in wait and attack the victim walking on a street. The victim does not feel anything the moment of the attack, yet doora intrudes into his/her body, causing an illness. Balgan reserved the above four terms for malignant cursing.

Balgan often used kargysh and chatka interchangeably, though in our discussions he tended to use the Russian word for "curse", *proklyatiye*, to refer to these conditions[57]. In response to my interest in learning words and spells (*zaklinaniya*, in Russian) for cursing, Balgan mentioned that a curse affliction could be accomplished simply by thinking malicious thoughts or uttering words of hate (either secretly or openly) about somebody or envying somebody. Yet the shaman Oyumaa, whom we will meet in section 1.8, told me that prokliatiye is even more powerful, if somebody commissions a special ritual performed by a shaman for that purpose. I suspect that some shamans know formulae or imprecations for cursing; however, it is very difficult to elicit such information, because, I think, this would imply that they have practised cursing either due

[56] Although, as we saw in section 1.1, buzhar is actually an adjective.
[57] Unless otherwise mentioned, I shall be using the word "curse" to refer to kargysh and chatka in the text.

to their own malignity against somebody or after being commissioned by a client, who intends to harm somebody.

According to Lindquist, who, as mentioned, has also done fieldwork on Tuvan shamanism, a curse can be sent against somebody either intentionally, as bad words and malign wishes explicitly directed to a person, or unintentionally, due to a conflict or a grudge. Based on this, we can draw a distinction between two modalities of cursing: intentional, in which one externalises unjustified malignity against somebody by such means as thinking malicious thoughts or uttering imprecations or commissioning a shaman to curse the target of his/her malice or envy; unintentional, in which a curse is born from the offence one has suffered and takes revenge on the offender independently of the victim's intention or even awareness. In the first case, the curse is an instrument under the control of a malign person intending to harm his/her victim. In the second, it is an unconscious force, uncontrolled by the person, which strikes the offender, seeking righteous retaliation. That is, it is a kind of retribution, which is automatically instigated by an offence that a person has suffered. Therefore, there is no moral condemnation for the offended, since this retaliatory force is beyond a person's control and it emerges as a response to an offence the latter has suffered:

I relay an example of this retaliation from Balgan himself:

"Some years ago, I was rich and I used to help my friends by lending them money. Once, I gave large sums of money to two friends of mine, because they were in great need. If I had kept the money, I could have bought two *Volga* cars. They agreed to repay me, but they didn't. Finally, they fell sick with cancer and implored me to forgive them. Of course, I feel sorry of these people, and I forgave them. But it is not I; it is my first name, *Kara-ool*, which punished them[58]. My grandmother, Kara-Kys[59], gave me this name in order to punish evil people. That is, she gave me her own name for punishing evil people, as she did. Even though I am a white shaman, I have a black name for that purpose. Even if you say once "Kara-ool is bad", this name will take revenge on you".

(The reader is advised to keep this account in mind, as we will return to it in chapters 3 and 4).

By this example Balgan implies that he is unaware of the particular moves that his retaliatory faculty, which is embedded in his name, may make (though he is aware that

[58] By coincidence, the word "kara" exists both in Tuvan and in Russian. It means "black" and "retribution" respectively.
[59] This name means "black girl" and is quite frequent among Tuvan women.

the faculty of retaliation is intrinsic in this name); it is a force beyond his control. However, I must underscore that Balgan would never use the term "prokliatiye" or any of the Tuvan terms for "curse" to describe this retribution. For him all these terms are associated with morally reprehensible words and practices through which envy, rancour and harmful intention are expressed. He said he would never endorse such behaviour; the contrary, once he scolded a female client (case 13, Table 1) who confided that she had secretly cursed an enemy of hers. Likewise, he drew a firm distinction between the above terms and *nakazaniye* (punishment, in Russian), claiming that he would agree to punish an evildoer on behalf of a client, but he would never curse somebody on behalf of a client. To punish, Balgan needs to have the full name of the evildoer written on a paper, on which he focuses his eyes (the latter functions also as a divinatory method). Another way to punish is by focusing his eyes on a photo showing the target[60].

As I mentioned (section 1.4), I had a first-hand experience of retaliatory sorcery, which Balgan practised at my own request[61]. I will briefly describe this event. It took place when the sun was going down (according to Balgan, this is the ideal moment for this kind of operation[62]). Balgan asked me to write my enemy's full name on a paper, and had his eyes fixed on it for a couple of minutes without speaking. In the process, he mentioned that his eyesight was traversing the sky toward the enemy's homeland (which is somewhere in Greece). His eye-flight was concluded with a finding which struck me at that moment: Balgan announced that at the moment his eyesight struck the target, the latter was in an office, part of a big complex, which he described to me with uncanny accuracy (although at that time I was not aware that I had sometimes referred to that place in our conversations). Balgan assured me that the victim's days would be numbered after this strike (I have not confirmed this yet). I must underscore that the above methods of punishment (staring at the victim's name or photo) do not involve intervention of spirits; they both involve the power of shamanic vision in perceiving hidden information and in carrying the client's desire for vengeance against the target.

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[60] For an example, see section 3.2.

[61] Of course, at that moment I was not aware that I was violating my principle of detachment as a fieldwork methodology (section 1.4). Nevertheless, my assumption of the role of the shaman's client commissioning ritual retaliation against the evildoer in this instance offers, I think, a characteristic example of "participant observation": I elicit information about Balgan's way of ritual retaliation, or more precisely, I observe him laying out in practice his statements about ritual retaliation, and at the same time I engage in this process as a client seeking retaliation.

[62] By contrast, according to the beliefs of the Even in northeastern Siberia, a curse is ideally cast at dawn; a person intending to avenge himself of an offence by means of cursing must climb on top of a mountain at dawn and curse the enemy (Anatolii Alekseev, personal communication).

The four kinds of cursing I distinguished at the beginning of this section differ from this practice known by anthropologists as "sorcery" which generally involves homeopathic or contagious magic, effected by means of spells, incantations, or noxious substances (see Obeyesekere 1975: 1; Turner 1967: 120). The only similarity between cursing and sorcery has to do with intention which is destructive in both cases (an additional similarity would be the use of special spells or incantations to cause harm, assuming that there are in Tuva forms of cursing involving such formulae). I do not have any empirical evidence of whether malevolent magic of the "sorcery" sort is practised in Tuva, though this practice is known and identified with the Russian expression *chiornaya magiya* (black magic). At least, I can tell with certainty that pre-Soviet Tuvans knew about magic – if not practised it: Vainshtein (1980: 241) mentions a clan called *Oduchu* (Sorcerer, in Tuvan). Balgan himself used the Russian term *magiya* for rituals performed by specialists in causing harm, though he tended to use the terms prokliatiye and magiya interchangeably. Following him, I shall be using the term "curse" (proklyatiye) in the 3rd case study (section 5.4), where a form of malevolent magic is implicated. However, we could draw a similarity between Balgan's typology of cursing and another classical term in the anthropological literature, that of "witchcraft". Bearing in mind Evans-Pritchard's definition of witchcraft among the Azande as causing harm by means of a psychic force (1937), it appears that cursing operates in a similar way; it involves a non-empirical (for us) means of causing harm: the entity of doora, a product of somebody's malicious thoughts against the victim.

1.7. Shamanic trance, the spirits and healing

I will start with a comment Balgan made regarding the shaman's trance, a state of mind, which for him is the precondition for contacting the spirits in rituals. In his own words: "City born and bred clients, who nowadays consult me, have no idea about trance and shamanism. It is only with elder clients that I can perform in the manner of the old shamans". And he went on: "With those [city born] clients I cannot go in a full trance and fall on the ground unconscious; if I do so, they will take me for a lunatic", to conclude: "This is how our shamans used to perform rituals in the past; at the moment when the shaman would fall to the ground trembling, the attendants would gather themselves

around and shout '*seriir bolgan*!'[63]. When the shaman would regain consciousness, the people around him would ask him what he had seen during the trance, what the cause of an illness was, how they should protect themselves from evil spirits". From this we can infer that shamanic trance involved for pre-Soviet Tuvans an epistemology of knowledge, whereby they countered misfortune and precariousness. With his reference to his modern clients Balgan seems to imply that trance has lost the importance it possessed for their predecessors as a way of uncovering the unknown. Though I cannot prove it at this point of my research, I would suggest that this development resulted from the internalisation by Balgan's urban clients of the Soviet ideology, which was hostile to shamanism and, particularly, to the shaman's dramatic performances[64]. Thus, Balgan cannot satisfy his impetus for a full trance due to social constraints. His performance must comply with the aesthetic expectations and anxieties of an urban clientele. The result is what I call a "bourgeois shamanism", which is devoid of what, according to Balgan, was a vital part of shamanic ritual in the past.

The information following derives from my conversations with Balgan on trance and curing, *emneer*[65]. Curing involves two stages: performing *kamlaniye* and laying hands on the client's body. Kamlaniye[66] is a Russian word used to describe shamanistic rituals of the Siberian peoples, particularly the shaman's drumming and chanting in order to summon the spirits. Balgan used the Russian word *ochishchenie* (cleansing) to refer to kamlaniye; it is, as he put it, a kind of quarantine, during which the client is cleansed from doora. But at the same time kamlaniye is a means of divinatory probing into the client's misfortune. As Balgan told me, in its course he enters a trance[67], a state of mental dissociation, during which he is flying back to his client's place of origin in the provinces in order to summon the spirits, *eeler*, of that place and carry them back to the consultation with the client. It is these spirits who remove the doora from the client's body and fill the empty space with "bio-energy" at Balgan's request. During this flight, which can be described as a voyage of the soul, since it is his *sünezin* (soul, in Tuvan) that leaves his body in trance, Balgan is watching his client's life being unfolded backwards: work and

[63] Past tense of the verb seriir, which means: "to conclude shamanic ritual". Balgan described seriir as a deep, cataleptic trance.
[64] See Znamenski 2003, for a review of early Soviet ethnographic studies emphasising the "backwardness" of shamanism as a therapeutic system, which, according to these studies, would eventually vanish after the advent of Soviet modernity.
[65] This is a Tuvan verb, which means "to cure".
[66] This term derives from the Altaic term "kam", which, as mentioned in section 1.5, means "shaman".
[67] Balgan used the Russian word for "trance", which is "*trans*".

marriage, the first years in the family, growing up. At a certain point of this process, which he described as watching a movie in the cinema, he identifies the source of misfortune, e.g., a curse somebody has cast against the client. Balgan's kamlaniye usually lasted approximately 15 minutes; this is longer than any other shaman's performance I observed at the Association. At the end of kamlaniye, Balgan used to whirl around several times just like the whirlwind (*kazyrgy*, in Tuvan), as he mentioned, in order to sweep the doora away. This practice was in a sense emblematic of his kamlaniye, since, according to him, he is the only shaman of the Association who does this. Kamlaniye has a third function (next to cleansing-filling with "bio-energy" and divination): it is a means of retribution, whereby the curses are sent back to their sender.

An important clarification must be made at this point: throughout the year of my fieldwork, I did not observe a single kamlaniye where Balgan had a deep or full trance – if by "trance" we mean a condition involving external manifestations typically described for "ecstatic shamanism", such as convulsions, cataleptic states and foaming at the mouth (see Peters & Price-Williams 1980, Rouget 1985, Vitebsky 1995: 64-65, Riboli 2002). The same applies to performances by other shamans, which I attended. Therefore, I did not have the chance to observe the kind of pre-Soviet, classical shamanic séances involving massive trances (for instance, Anisimov 1963, Shirokogoroff 1935: 306-308, Arbman 1968), which, according to Vitebsky (personal communication), were designed to have a dramatic effect on the patient and the audience. Though Balgan did not display the typical manifestations of deep trance during his kamlaniye (as we saw, he said that social constraints prevent him from going into a full trance), I would not preclude that he may experience a lesser degree of trance involving mental dissociation from his surroundings. Finding the cause of a client's misfortune during kamlaniye – something that involves watching the client's biography being unfolded toward the past – probably requires him to achieve a certain degree of mental dissociation from his surroundings. There were some external features suggestive of Balgan's attempt to achieve a state of visualisation or of an intense mental concentration during kamlaniye: contorted face with eyes shut and swinging his head from side to side, while he was beating the drum. Although these features do not necessarily reflect Balgan's state of consciousness during kamlaniye in any accurate manner, they are suggestive, I think, of a mind experiencing a certain degree of dissociation (trance) from physical surroundings.

If doora has not been completely removed by kamlaniye, Balgan proceeds to the second stage: laying his palms on the ailing part of the client's body in order to remove

the remnants of doora and pass “bio-energy” to him/her. This practice involves a parallel concentration of doora on his palm and a transmission of “bio-energy”, which reinstates the proper function of an organ. Balgan practised this hand laying in all the consultations involving cure of an ailment which I observed (in all these cases his diagnosis was curse-affliction). According to him, if doora has entered too deeply in the client’s body and multiplied, removal is possible only by means of hand laying. After concentrating doora in his hands, Balgan used to rush outside growling in order to throw it away in the yard of the Association; his growls were caused by contact with doora, an experience which he described as lifting a heavy stone. As he told me, Balgan can feel whether there is doora in the client’s body by placing his palm on the body; a sensation of touching something as hairy as a bear’s hide indicates the presence of doora. When being thrown out of the client’s body, doora takes the shape of the person who cursed the client. Removing doora by means of laying hands does not require Balgan to experience trance or transition to a mentally dissociated state.

Apart from spirits of the client’s homeland, Balgan invokes several other spirits for curing, depending on the graveness of the illness in each case. Thus, he may invoke the spirit of his shaman-grandmother, Kara-Kys, but he does so only under life-threatening circumstances, because, as he mentioned, it is very difficult to call her. When this happens, the spirit descends from heaven, treats the client momentarily and flies back to heaven. Another important spirit is his *eeren*; each shaman has his/her eeren, an animal-like spirit, which is called for curing. Balgan’s eeren is the bear (*adyg*, in Tuvan), which, as Vainshtein writes (see 1964: 2, 1978: 459, 1984: 355), is regarded by Tuvans as the most powerful shamanic spirit. Balgan reported the typical shamanic experience of transformation into the helping spirit during kamlaniye: he changes into a bear; yet I must note that he did not express this transformation during kamlaniye in any visible way, such as imitating the bear’s sounds. Balgan’s eeren resides in two receptacles: a human-like effigy, hanging over his chair, and a human-like countenance, attached to the crosspieces of his drum.

A final comment should be made regarding “bio-energy”. As I mentioned, Balgan described the experience of kamlaniye as a flight to the client’s homeland, whence he summons the spirits, asking them to remove doora from the client and fill him/her with “bio-energy”. In our discussions about healing, as well as in his interactions with clients, he referred to this curative force by the Russian terms “*bio-energiya*” or simply “*energiya*”. These terms refer to the so-called “bio-energy healing”, a system of healing

practices based on the idea that living organisms are surrounded by energy fields, which can be perceived and mentally manipulated by certain individuals, who claim (or are believed) to possess the gift of *extra-sensory* perception; that is, the ability to perceive the bio-fields and radiations both within and outside a body and to correct their functions. Such practitioners are principally known in Russia as *extra-sensy*, "bio-field healers" or "extra-sensorial healers" (Lindquist 2001b). Bio-energetic healing and paranormal experiences, an issue that still captures Russian popular imagination, became the subject of scientific research under the auspices of the KGB in Soviet times. After the collapse of communism it came into the public arena, assuming proportions of mass hysteria mainly through performances by mega-scale magicians such as Anatolii Kashpirovski, whose massive hypnotisms in stadiums were telecast throughout Russia, while today research involves laboratory experiments on healers believed to have "paranormal abilities" under the auspices of scientific committees such as the "All-Russian Scientific Research Center of Traditional Medicine" (Lindquist 2001a; 2001b).

Balgan's description of his therapeutic efficacy in terms of bio-energy does not mean that he designates himself as an *extra-sens* (singular of "extra-sensy"); the contrary, he used to invoke his shamanic descent in order to claim authenticity and ritual efficacy and thus to differentiate himself from the tide of various wizards and psychics in Kyzyl, whom he pejoratively cast as extra-sensy, a term that for him has connotations of charlatanism and ritual inefficiency. Balgan explained to me his penchant for a vocabulary which is the flagship of this kind of healers whom he himself castigates as charlatans, as fitting his clients' familiarity with bio-energy. In his own words: "By bio-energiya I mean the spirits of nature, which I invoke for curing. But nowadays most of the clients understand the cure as the effect of bio-energiya rather than of spirits; therefore, I call my healings bio-energiya, so that they understand me". Thus, to achieve a mutual understanding and claim therapeutic efficacy before his clients, Balgan is forced into drawing on a currently popular therapeutic discourse which is also used by practitioners whom he castigates as inauthentic. I will return to Balgan's bio-energy in section 6.1, where I will argue that his "bio-energy" is a metaphor for a conflict between the spirits of two shaman-ancestors of his, who struggle within Balgan in order to take full possession of him.

1.8. Sketches of shamanic psychobiography: Balgan and two other shamans

Any attempt to construct a complete picture of Balgan's character – to the extent that I was able to understand his personality in depth during only one year – is beyond the purpose of this thesis. Balgan is a middle-aged Tuvan man, who has been living with his second wife over the past few years (his wife, a Tuvan middle-aged woman, is the cashier of the Association). His first wife, with whom he begat many children, died in 1996 (possibly of drinking). Balgan, who had been working as a shaman until that time, gave up his practice and plunged into drinking as a result of this loss. I did not probe into this, because I was afraid that my interrogations would undermine the good relationship, which I had established with him. Yet a comment he made possibly throws light on the events of this death: "I was young, handsome, and she did not like the fact that as a shaman I was treating women". It seems that their marriage suffered from conflict which ultimately led to his ex-wife's death.

Having overcome this crisis, Balgan resumed his shamanic activity in 1999 and soon became the Head of a shamanic Association in Kyzyl. However, internal enmities in this Association forced Balgan, as he told me, to leave the Association. In 2000 he and another senior shaman from his previous workplace founded another Association, which numbers 16 shamans as of today. Balgan, as the Head of the Association, along with a few other shamans (I introduce two of them below) treat the majority of the clients, as the rest of shamans roam throughout Tuva to offer their services and they may not visit the Association for months; I doubt whether I saw all the shamans of the Association during my fieldwork. The Association is accommodated in an old, small house, which is divided into two rooms: the main consultation room, where Balgan and the other founding shaman have their desks, and a smaller room used by all the other shamans (yet this working division is somewhat loose, as sometimes other shamans used Balgan's desk to treat clients when he was absent or busy with repairing his car, a dilapidated old Volga). Balgan emphasised that everything has run smoothly for him after his recent resumption of shamanic practice.

Balgan was born approximately 55 years ago in a village two hours away from Kyzyl by car. He spent the first twelve years of his life with his grandparents in a tent (*ög*). He recalls these years as a period of affluence. As he mentioned, his grandmother, Kara-Kys, was a "great shaman" (*ylyg kham*), who was renowned throughout Tuva for her healings. At that time, shamans received cattle as a reward for a kamlaniye, and Kara-Kys had accumulated a big herd as a result of the numerous healings she had performed.

So, Balgan lived in abundance during the first years of his life. He did not go to school during the period of living with his grandparents. As he himself put it, he studied next to his grandfather, a lama, who had been educated in the *sutras* (Lamaist texts) in Tibet, and learned his grandmother's techniques of healing by participating in her rituals as her helper.

Yet this happy period was abruptly terminated, when Soviet officers invaded the tent and murdered his grandparents[68]. From that moment onwards, Balgan's life turned into an ordeal full of hardship and privations. The authorities deprived Balgan's father of his right to employment due to his shamanic descent – Balgan's father was the son of Kara-Kys and he had inherited the ability of curing, which he secretly practised. Balgan recalled that this was a time of long starvation for him. It seems to me that this is the motivational origin of his current preoccupation with starvation, as the latter is expressed through his belief that there is an increase in the incidence of cursing due to starvation (section 1.1).

Balgan claimed that he graduated from an advanced institute of administration in Moscow (I wonder whether this is true). Returning to Kyzyl, he took up the administration of the Association of Hunters, a position from which he resigned in 1988 due to a life-changing experience, as he claimed. A night, as he was reading a book, he was suddenly visited by the spirit of Kara-Kys, who stretched out her arm and touched him. This was a sign of initiation; Kara-Kys had passed her curing power to her grandson. Balgan began to cure people and in 1992 he was involved in the establishment of the first shamanic Association in Kyzyl. He has practised as a shaman ever since, apart from an intermission of three years due to the loss of his first wife (as mentioned before).

The first time I visited his Association, I saw Balgan sitting on a chair and reading a newspaper. This struck me, as it was not compatible with the representations of shamans as extraordinary or socially withdrawn persons, which I had absorbed from the Soviet and Western ethnographies of shamanism. Balgan was well informed about events of national or global importance, such as the problem of Chechnya and the American "war on terror". He had a good knowledge of modern Tuvan history and used to read Tuvan mythology and folklore a lot. In our first meeting, one of the first things he did was to show to me cards from researchers who had visited him or studied him. These cards were for him tokens of his prestige as a shaman. To my surprise, he mentioned that

[68] See section 4.2.

one of these anthropologists was Galina Lindquist, whose seminar on Tuvan shamans I had attended before going to the field (section 1.4).

Just like any entrepreneur or Head of an organisation, Balgan was interested in material and social advancement. His aspiration for upward social mobility was expressed through his secret involvement in the political system as a consultant of high-ranked officials. As he confided to me, these officials employed him in order to protect them against the curses cast by the shamans of their political opponents and to advise them on how to run public matters. He asserted that he could exert much influence on them to his own benefit – by this he possibly meant that he would secure funding in order to expand his Association. At the same time, shamanic practice was for him a means of making a living or, in his own words, an "everyday job" (*yezhednievnaya rabota*, in Russian). Once, I asked him how he would survive if Tuvans stopped cursing each other. He responded: "It does not matter, people will die in any case and they will need to be sent off to the other world", and added "*Azhyl kham chok arbas*" ("a shaman cannot be without job", in Tuvan). As we will see (section 2.1), sending off the soul of a deceased is one of the commonest types of ritual that Balgan performs for clients.

Yet some incidents made me think that money or social mobility was not the only motivation which compelled Balgan to practice as a shaman. Most of the time he was in a good mood, always willing to discuss my questions about shamanism, and he had a good sense of humour. However, there were days when he seemed to be withdrawn in his thoughts and unwilling to treat clients or engage in any interaction with me or anybody else. On these occasions, each time I attempted to probe into his psychological state, he would keep his eyes closed and nervously touch his temples, a sign that he was entangled with something disturbing or of critical importance to him. His only comment about that, after having resumed ordinary interaction, was: "*U menya yest' takie dni*" ("I have such days", in Russian). A solution to the mystery around this comment will be suggested in section 6.1, where the impact that the ancestral spirit of Shokar, the albys-shaman (section 1.5), exerts on Balgan will be revealed in a curing session.

I studied two more shamans as well, though not as extensively as Balgan. Maadyr, a middle-aged Tuvan man, is the kara-kham (black shaman) of the Association. He was always willing to impart his knowledge on ritual retaliation, and he became a good informant as well as an advisor, providing me with various tips on surviving in Kyzyl. Before becoming a shaman, Maadyr had spent many years in prison (I do not know the reason, though I suspect it is homicide); he himself told me this, when a fellow ex-

prisoner visited him. Maadyr was a regular drinker; I came across him wandering drunk in downtown Kyzyl a couple of times. He had many children and was divorced. Once, he exhorted me to practise as a shaman for the good of my research: "Bring your drum here and start to treat people, Kostya[69]! If you do not practice, how are you going to understand what the client's soul suffers from?" My overall impression of Maadyr was that, despite his long imprisonment, he had enjoyed his life.

Oyumaa, an albys-kham herself, is a woman at her early thirties and a mother of two. She has married twice, but both marriages failed. There are two shamanic lines of descent in her family, an albys one from her mother's side and a heavenly one from her father's side; Oyumaa inherited the albys line. The first signs of her shamanic election appeared at the age of four in the form of visions of spirits. Her mother invited a shaman to sever the link between the albys and Oyumaa. A couple of years later, she had another vision of a multitude of women surrounding her; this happened while she was walking outside during an evening (after this her mother did not allow her to walk outside at sunset, because albys spirits use to wander at that time). She described her adolescence as full of agony due to severe mental illness. Her grandfather from her mother's line, an albys-kham, died when Oyumaa was fourteen years old and afflicted her with fits (according to Oyumaa, a shaman passes on his "gift", his power, to his descendants only after death). The doctors diagnosed "neurasthenia" and she was hospitalised[70]; in the meantime, she had enrolled as a member of the *Komsomol* Communist Youth. Two years later, she was visited again by her grandfather's spirit; she would see dead people around her and knew in advance who was going to die. This time she was diagnosed as an epileptic. Her family consulted a shaman, who concluded that Oyumaa had to become a shaman or the ancestral spirit would kill her. Oyumaa started to train herself in mastering this spirit. About the same time, she started to attend classes in a dramatic school, but she gave up. Then she worked as a secretary at the police department in Kyzyl, but she soon realised that her shamanic calling required full devotion. She came to this realisation after feeling an uncontrollable compulsion to shamanize, which, as she told me, derives from her albys shaman-ancestor. In her own words: "my grandfather is tormenting me"[71]. Oyumaa used to describe her relation with her albys shaman-ancestor in terms of total

[69] This is my name in Russian.
[70] This perhaps suggests that psychiatrists in Tuva tend to apply the category of "neurasthenia" to what for ethnic Tuvans like Oyumaa and her family would be affliction by a shamanic spirit (cf. Skultans 1998, for a discussion of neurasthenia as a common diagnostic category among psychiatrists in Latvia).
[71] In Russian: "*Dedushka muchit menya*".

identification: “I am an albys”. I cannot but wonder whether this self-designation signifies that Oyumaa is possessed by her albys ancestor during kamlaniye or when curing clients.

Even if I had not known about Oyumaa’s adolescence, I would have been certain that she was not drawn to shamanism due to prestige, money, or any other materialistic objective. For her, shamanic practice was not a profession. She was uninterested in material aspects of life, even though she was always neatly dressed and presentable. She was absorbed in her writings about her dialogues with spirits (she had filled a dozen notebooks) as well as in Buddhist meditation. For her, shamanism and Buddhism were inextricably tied together. Specifically, Buddhism was for her a code of morality; in her own words: “Without Buddhism people do kargysh (curse)”. Oyumaa was interested in cultivating spirituality in me. Once she told me that the spirits wanted me to become a shaman, while she visited me in my apartment in order to teach me meditation, but to no avail. We will meet Oyumaa anew in a fascinating ritual (section 5.2), where she will draw two impressive designs showing the forces of the curse and the attack of Balgan’s energy on these.

1.9. Tuvan shamanism in the post-Soviet age

In a fashion similar to other Siberian Republics[72], by 1950 shamanism in Tuva had become almost extinct due to an anti-religious campaign involving persecution of shamans and prohibition of ritual curing (Moskalenko-Vainshtein 1995: 72). A reaction to repression was secret rituals: Balgan recalled that some shamans were still performing during the 50s by beating with a stick the metal mirror (*küzünggü*, in Tuvan), an instrument normally used for diagnosing a disease, instead of the high-sounding drum. Another informant recalled an instant cure to appease the shaman’s impulse to trance: ring relentlessly a small bell by the shaman’s ears before the eruption of a seizure, which the authorities would mistake for a coarse infringement of the anti-religious edict. This would calm the repressed soul, whose bearer would fall into a trance for several hours[73].

Nevertheless, there were shamans who defied the Soviet rule at the cost of being imprisoned or killed. Balgan proudly used to commemorate the determination of his grandmother Kara-Kys, who was renowned for her all-night curing séances in times of

[72] See Il’yakhov-Khamsa 1995 and Vasil’eva 2000, for the Republic of Sakha (Yakutiya); also, Suslov 1931.
[73] See Vitebsky 2002, for a similar example concerning an old Yakut shaman during Soviet repression.

suppression. In his own words: "She was firm and fearless; no matter how many times she was imprisoned, she would not give up practising. Once an officer shot against her, and she stopped the bullets on the air just by stretching out her arm with the palm facing him[74]". As we shall see (section 4.2), Kara-Kys paid with her life her resistance against the regime.

From the romanticism of resistance to the reality of revival: following the declaration of Tuva as an Autonomous Republic, shamanism was "resurrected" through the establishment of shamanic Associations. Drawing together the expertise of various healers, most of them claiming a shamanic descent, these Associations are authorised by the State as official religious organisations and professional clinics (Lindquist 2001a; also, Anaibin 1994:105; 1998-99: 60-61).

The catalytic event for this revival was a conference on Tuvan shamanism held in Kyzyl in 1993 on the initiative of Dr. Mongush Kenin-Lopsan, a prolific writer on Tuvan culture and a famous ethnologist claiming a shamanic ancestry[75]. The participants included Tuvan shamans, scholars and neo-shamans from the Foundation for Shamanic Studies[76]. Following this, the Tuvan government established a "Centre for the Study of Shamanism" under the auspices of the Republican museum *Aldan Maadyr* and sponsored a project for the study of the effectiveness of shamanic healing by medical professionals (Moskalenko-Vainshtein 1995: 73; also, Van Deusen 2004: 171). About the same time, the first shamanic Association, called *Dungur* (Drum) was established in Kyzyl. Over the next years, three more Associations emerged in Kyzyl; the most recently established ones are the *Adyg-Eeren* (Bear-Spirit) and the *Khattyg-Taiga* (Windy Taiga). The most famous of the shamanic Associations of Tuva – and by far the most flamboyant – is the *Tos-Deer*[77], which somewhat stands as a symbol of Tuvan shamanism by virtue of its privileged location (close to the embankment of the Yenisei river, only a few yards away

[74] I cannot but make a connection with an identical scene from the popular (even in Tuva) science-fiction movie "Matrix", where the supernatural hero repels in the same way his enemies' bullets. I wonder whether high-tech cinematic culture made in Hollywood has been a source of imaginative reconstitution of Balgan's account regarding his grandmother's resistance against the Soviets. Of course, one could say the reverse: science-fiction cinema has been heavily influenced by shamanic features found in the mythologies of Asian cultures.

[75] For information on Kenin-Lopsan's biography, see an interview he gave to the Russian ethnographer Valentina Kharitonova (Kharitonova 2000: 55).

[76] See the website: www.shamanism.org. The Foundation of Shamanic Studies (San Francisco Bay Area) is headed by Dr. Michael Harner, an anthropologist practising as a shaman, who has introduced the notion of "core shamanism", referring to the universal basics of shamanic practice free from cultural particulars (see his popular text-book "The Way of the Shaman", 1990).

[77] It means "Ninth Heaven" in Tuvan, referring to the traditional belief of the cosmos divided into nine levels, which the shaman traverses during kamlaniye.

from the obelisk bearing the inscription "Centre of Asia"[78] and on the same road as the Buddhist temple), as well as of the fact that it is presided over by Kenin-Lopsan. (Though I initially intended to work in Tos-Deer, I chose another Association for reasons presented in section 1.4)[79]. All the Associations of Kyzyl are headed by prominent practising shamans, like Balgan himself (see Lindquist 2005).

Undoubtedly, Lindquist is right to observe that shamanic revival in southern Siberia is linked to the local politics of ethnic consolidation and restoration of traditional cultures (2001a: 6). A movement that several Tuvan intellectuals formed in the beginning of 90s, so as to bring shamanism at the focus of local (and international) interest confirms this. We could parallel the shamanic revival that appeared in Tuva in the early 90s to a similar process taking place in Sakha Republic (north-eastern Siberia) at the same time, which Balzer describes as a movement of politicised cultural revitalisation aiming at the resurgence of Sakha ethnic consciousness (1993a; 1993b; 1993c); yet, judging from the current situation, it seems that the initial enthusiasm around shamanic revival in Tuva withered away in the following years. Apart from occasional efforts by local intellectuals in the early 90s to attract public attention through organising shamanic performances on theatrical stages and sacred sites in the countryside, there is not currently any revivalist movement or any state-sponsored project of shamanic revival in Tuva. Whatever enthusiasm exuded from cultural and religious events after the downfall of the communist regime, it soon disappeared under the pressure of the generalised destitution and of the financial problems burdening the function of the Associations; to perform either on stage or in a sacred site, the shamans require funds, which are extremely difficult – if not impossible – to secure from the Tuvan government. I suspect that, rather than stirring the audiences' reflection on Tuvan ethnic identity, these events offered the opportunity for an escape from the precariousness of daily life; in other words, they managed to carry the audiences to a trance, but not of the quality anticipated by their organisers.

If these Associations are living monuments to shamanic revival, their presence in Kyzyl is shadowy and their influence in the public sphere is hardly ever felt – at least, in relation to Buddhism, the latter considered as an institutionalised religion (something that is reflected on the political and financial support it receives; see below). I present below several incidents from my fieldwork, which indicate this. Trying to trace the Associations

[78] It is claimed that the point, where this obelisk has been erected, is the geographical centre of the Asian continent.
[79] Tos-Deer required me to sign a contract and pay an outrageously high fee for doing fieldwork there.

after my arrival at Kyzyl, I was startled to realise that the taxi-drivers (most of them Tuvans) had never heard about them – apart from the imposing Tos-Deer – or that they did not know their locations; I never managed to go by taxi to an Association, without telling the address to the driver. My landlady and her husband, both educated Buddhists, learned from *me* about the existence of the Association where I did my fieldwork, while they had never heard anything about the other Associations of Kyzyl (apart from Tos-Deer). These examples probably suggest that lack of interest in shamanic revival is a generalised social phenomenon, which is spread throughout the lower and the middle-upper levels of Tuvan society. On the basis of these responses, we could conclude that the social influence of these Associations is marginal, if non-existent at all; that is, that these Associations exist only as museums of an early 90s revival that did not eventually flourish. The latter might be true, yet the data on the number of consultations that took place in Balgan's Association during my fieldwork will reveal that the shamans of these Associations play an important role in the life of contemporary Tuvans, as they regulate by means of various rituals interpersonal relations between their clients and evil spirits or souls of deceased relatives, as well as between curse-inflicted clients and their enemies (see chapter 2).

Indifference and repudiation of the modern shamans' authenticity are revealed by the following comment by another taxi-driver: "After the fall of communism the city is full of shamans; somebody wants to become a shaman? That's it, so easy!" According to this informant, the shamanic revival, which, I think, he saw as a post-Soviet hypertrophy of religious expression, has impinged on the authenticity of shamanic practice; his remark seems to imply that the fact that a tide of shamans has appeared in Kyzyl after the fall of communism means that the criteria for assuming the shaman's role have loosened. I think that this informant's reaction to an overflow of shamanic practitioners (that is, to his own estimation about the number of shamans in Kyzyl) – his ironic dismissal of contemporary shamans as inauthentic – is an individual expression of a currently widespread disposition of ambivalence toward the figure of the shaman in Tuva. On the one hand, these shamans are dismissed as inauthentic, or "*artisty*" and "*sharlatany*" ("artistes" and "charlatans", in Russian), possibly because their biographies and patterns of living do not conform to the laymen's expectations of the "authentic shaman": a significant number of the shamans I met were leading erratic lives, they used to drink excessively, while they did not seem to be concerned with the fact that their biographies of shamanic initiation were bereft of the defining element of shamanic authenticity (from the layman's point of view) nowadays in

Tuva, hereditary bestowal of shamanic power (all these shamans had a "dark" biography, as they had been recruited after an attack by albys or by evil spirits, that is, a biography of a lower quality compared to that of a hereditary shaman). Nonetheless, on the other hand, in moments of crisis laypeople leave aside questions of authenticity and consult shamans, whom in different contexts they would disapprove as inauthentic. It seems to me that the taxi-driver's above reaction corresponds to the public facet of the social ambivalence towards shamans, which, nevertheless, is no less sincere that the hidden one; in moments of crisis, he could switch to the covert aspect of this ambivalence, whereby those "lower" shamans are particularly apt in mastering evil spirits or in mastering these spirits in order to drive somebody ill (section 1.5). In the process, drawing on an ethnographic example, I will dwell on another kind of ambivalence around the person of the shaman, cast in terms of "good" and "evil" or "mischievous". Here, accepting that my informant's view about a statistical overflow of shamanic practitioners in post-Soviet Tuva has an element of truth, I suggest a tentative explanation of this hypertrophy, which is of a motivational nature: it could be that the freedom of religious expression after 1990 gave the chance to many individuals to express a hereditary compulsion for shamanism, which remained repressed until that time.

In these examples, comments from people belonging to different levels of the urban society of Kyzyl render unrealistic my hope of finding a grand shamanic revival, which was one of the reasons that I selected this place for my fieldwork. In his doctoral dissertation on reindeer herding in Tuva, anthropologist Brian Donahoe presents a similar situation: his first trip to Tuva in 1997 led him to realise that the shamanic revival which had attracted the attention of Western academics and journalists, was alien to laymen's understandings of "shamanism" as a worldview where the spirits are immanent to nature, a worldview that does not necessarily depend on the shaman's presence (2003: vi; also, Vitebsky 1997, 2002, 2005). Nonetheless, it seems to me that it is not only that Tuvans are uninterested in ideas or projects of cultural (shamanic) revival; my impression is that even some of the actors involved in revivalist movements are frustrated owing to the realisation that their plans remain unfulfilled.

A striking expression of this came from a Tuvan intellectual involved in shamanic revival. In my presence, he lamented the financial plight of the shamanic Association he supported, and accused the State of selectively sponsoring the revival of Buddhism. Characteristically, he exclaimed: "*Nietu deneg!*" ("There is no money!" in Russian), concluding in this way his narrative of a series of futile attempts to raise funds for the

Association. Indeed, like the majority of urban Tuvans, the Associations in Kyzyl are struggling to survive, while most of these are riven by internal conflicts and inter-tribal competition in the name of authenticity and effectiveness[80]. The collective rituals, which the shamans of each of these Associations perform at sacred sites in the countryside, offer an opportunity to heal the wounds of internal conflict and re-establish solidarity. But even these occasions, so crucial for the ideological sustenance of the Associations, show a lack of awareness that few members of the Tuvan public follow the shamans' moves, apart from their kin and occasionally some foreign neo-shamanic pilgrims or ethnographers.

Though the pragmatic purpose of these rituals is to achieve internal solidarity[81], in essence they reproduce the Soviet-style hierarchy of the Association, since the shamans perform in accordance with the order of rank. I observed two such rituals organised by Balgan's Association. In both of them it was Balgan who performed the inaugural and the conclusive kamlaniye, something that, as it transpired later, was received as an exposition of arrogance and authoritarianism by several shamans of his Association, who purportedly coveted Balgan's chair. It is perhaps an irony (and something that shamans ideologically opposed to the Soviet past of Tuva, like Balgan, have to consider) that the revived form of Tuvan shamanism incorporates the hierarchical structures of the Soviet professional organisation; in documents about the legal status of his Association, Balgan is mentioned as *predsedatel'* (chairman, in Russian), a title which he pronounced with pride each time he had the chance to. It seems to me that hierarchy in pre-Soviet shamanism could never have been important, since, as some of my informants stressed, in the past shamans never performed together or even near each other; this is because, as I was told, each shaman invoked different kinds of spirits, which under no circumstances should be intermingled, lest a war erupted between them[82]. An informant told me that she was struck to see so many shamans performing together, when she first visited Balgan's

[80] The most well-known case of internal conflict is this one between Kenin-Lopsan and the reputed shaman Sailyk-ool, whom the former had appointed as Head of Tos-Deer; Sailyk-ool established his own Association after being ousted from Tos-Deer. Their conflict was in court during my fieldwork. As regards the war between Associations, this is waged on two levels: on the political level, through the backstabbing between high-ranked shamans in their competition for political support; second, on the magical level, through curse-attacks aiming to kill the opponent. Balgan himself deflects such curses in dreams about his opponents performing kamlaniye against him.

[81] I imagine that Balgan would disagree with this interpretation. The typical response on such occasions was that the ritual was performed in order to request protection and prosperity from the spirits. Yet I think that this purpose runs parallel to a pragmatic purpose, re-affirming solidarity and setting aside internal conflicts between shamans, which occurred in his Association during my fieldwork.

[82] This could be a metaphoric expression of contest between shamans, but presently there is no way to ascertain ethnographically whether this is true.

Association. As modern bureaucratic organisations, the Associations carry in themselves the heritage of the Soviet State.

I argued that the presence of shamanic Associations in the public life of Kyzyl is shadowy. The same argument fits to the shamans themselves, so far as I can infer from my discussions with laypeople. Apart from the Heads of the Associations, the label of "shaman" does not confer prestige or any special privilege to its incumbent; this stands in contrast to pre-Soviet times, where shamans who were invited to cure a patient or cleanse a tent (or a whole village) from curses, enjoyed utmost respect and were lavishly rewarded[83]. Most of the shamans I worked with negatively commented on their clients' parsimony regarding the payment of ritual services, perhaps a testimony to the fact that the current socio-economic pressures do not permit most people to satisfy the shamans' expectations of reward. Furthermore, not only are these shamans devoid of the prestige and the right to special privileges which their predecessors enjoyed, but also, they can be mistrusted and identified as malicious persons indulging in curses. I was struck to get the same response from several laypeople, after briefly presenting to them my field project: "Ah, kargysh, shamans cause this kind of thing". The fact that these people held the same view of shamans as casting curses led me to surmise that I had discovered a powerful social idiom, a secret code shared between Tuvans, which pervades laymen's understandings of shamanism. Yet this idiom lags behind the outward image of the shaman as treating for curses. To mention an example, a young woman, whom I came to know quite well commissioned a (male) shaman to expel a curse from her apartment; but the same night following the ritual she saw an eerie figure (the shaman's!), something that led her to suspect that this shaman had done "something bad" in her apartment. Thus, there is ambiguity in the social perception of shamanic practice: the shaman is both the curer and the catalyst of curse affliction[84].

The ambiguity toward shamans is not only due to the belief that they cast curses, but also due to their reputed inclination to drinking. The Association where I worked had this reputation, which I can confirm; some shamans used to treat clients under the influence of vodka, despite Balgan's admonitions to abstain from alcohol, but – so far as I can tell – drunkenness did not affect their performance (the contrary, I suspect that for these shamans alcoholic trance facilitated the achievement of visions, something that

[83] Balgan remembers that Kara-kys was offered the best parts of a sheep, which had specially been cooked for her, and she was always served first after treating a client. Her reward included several animals for each curing ritual she performed.

perhaps explains why shamans are inclined to drinking). But there is also something else which will probably reinforce the notoriety of this Association – if it circulates in Kyzyl. One of the first things I noticed was a worn, three-digit number on the arms of several male shamans, which had obviously been imprinted (I did not pay attention to this, even though my mind went straight to scenes from a prison). Much later, another shaman confided to me that these shamans were ex-convicts who had spent many years in prison for homicide[85].

I mentioned that the Associations in Kyzyl are headed by prominent shamans. By this, I do not mean that these shamans are widely known to the public – perhaps except for the Head of Tos-Deer, a female shaman called Ai-Churek[86], who has enjoyed much publicity owing to the performances and seminars on shamanism she has given abroad. For instance, contrary to Balgan's assertion that the Tuvan nation knows him as the greatest of all shamans and his Association as a centre of excellence, I found out that none of my acquaintances had ever heard anything about him or about the Heads of the two other Associations. Perhaps the only opportunity for these shamans to shed the veil of inconspicuousness and become superstars for a night is the annual celebration of *Shagaa*[87], when enmities are set aside in favour of an overnight ritual to welcome the New Year. I watched this event on the Republican "Tuva Channel". Resplendent in their flamboyant attires, Balgan and all the other Heads of the Associations were performing close to a big fire, trying to outdo each other with the loudness of their voices and the intensity of their drumming and dangerously approaching the fire, determined possibly to prevail over each other even at the cost of being destroyed by the flames.

During my fieldwork, no state-sponsored shamanic performance took place. By contrast, one evening in June 2003 a three-hour performance of *khöömei*, the famous Tuvan overtone singing, unequalled in its grandeur, took place in the huge hall of the Republican Theatre of Kyzyl with an inaugural speech by the President of the Republic, Sheryg-ool Oorzhak, and the participation of the local musical elite (including delegates from Japan and Norway). The séance reached its emotional culmination when the leading

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[84] See Englund 1996: 272, for a similar ambiguity surrounding the practices of the healer in Malawi.
[85] If this is true, these cases raise an exceptionally interesting phenomenon, which could be compared to what Obeyesekere (1981) notes regarding the ecstatic priestesses of Sri Lanka: devotion to the gods and ritual acts of self-mortification are undertaken as a penance in expiation of guilt due to having betrayed a parental figure. I can only speculate whether these people turned to shamanism in order to expiate guilt of homicide, as I do not have detailed data on their psychobiographies.
[86] See her website: www.ai-churek.com. Interestingly, the website includes a page where several shamanic instruments are offered for purchase, an example of commercialisation of shamanic practice in Tuva.
[87] Shagaa is the Tuvan New Year, which is celebrated by Buddhists and shamanists in the end of February.

singer of khöömei in Tuva appeared on stage to perform an ethnic anthem and collect a $1,000 prize. The crowd turned ecstatic as his vocal cords produced the characteristic whistling sound of khöömei. This impressive event led me to conclude that in the public culture of Tuva throat singing is much more important than the collective performances of shamans.

Writing on shamanic revival in Tuva as early as in 1995, Moskalenko & Vainshtein noted that the possibility for a reappearance of the number of shamans registered at the beginning of the Soviet persecution is weak[88]. Nevertheless, they emphasised that the "mythological foundations of shamanism", as they themselves put it, which have been preserved in Tuvan culture up to the present, allow the prediction that shamanic revival will continue evolving in the next ten years (1995: 73). If by "shamanic revival" they referred to the shamanic Associations which have successively emerged in Tuva since 1995, their prediction proved to be right. Yet, as I noted, these Associations do not play an important role in the public life of Kyzyl. My fieldwork indicates that Balgan's Association is not a focal point in the public culture of Kyzyl; instead, this Association (and all the other ones, I conjecture) is a focal point or a node in an operation of curse accusations which exists – and, in my view, proliferates – beneath the surface of public life. Apart from these Associations, there might exist many other nodes attracting people with curse-inflicted misfortunes, such as various wizards and psychics (known as extra-sensy), but my research did not extend to them. As the quantitative data on the various kinds of shamanic practice will show (next chapter), consultations redressing curse-inflicted misfortunes are only a minor fraction of the totality of ritual practice in Balgan's Association, with divinations and rituals for sending off the soul of dead humans, being the numerically dominant ones. This means that the whole repertoire of Balgan's ritual practices affects the lives of many more people, apart from those afflicted with curses. Furthermore, his rituals of sending off the dead have a socially integrative function, as they offer an opportunity for reinstating traditional social institutions such as the family and the wider kin unit (clan).

[88] Based on a census conducted in Tuva in 1931, Moskalenko and Vainshtein (1995: 71-72) suggest that the number of shamans in Tuva prevailed all over Siberian peoples. To mention some relevant demographic features, among 65,000 registered Tuvans there were 725 male and female shamans; in 16,000 collective farms there were approximately 1,000 shamans; and in every farm there was probably at least one shaman. In the years following, the number of shamans substantially decreased owing to the anti-shamanist propaganda and to the improvement of the medical system, so that by the mid-50s there were not more than 10 shamans left (ibid. 1995: 71-72).

My point is that shamanic revival in Tuva did not eventually assume an outward manifestation as a movement of expressing messages of ethnic resurgence and political independence (though it began with this aspiration in the early 90s). My research shows that a particular component of the revival of shamanic practices, though a limited one, that is, the curse-removals and ritual retaliations Balgan and his colleagues perform, addresses a dark feature of social reality, interpersonal conflict expressed through curse accusations. This is a world parallel to the surface reality of public life, which comprises people experiencing tensions and frustrations over making a living, a situation that forms the ground for the development of "curse paranoia" canalised against the subject of one's suspicions. Within the Tuvan microcosm of dissociation, suspiciousness and hostility, the shaman is a regulator of "paranoia": Balgan cultivates his client's suspicions of curse affliction by means of validating and intensifying them or pulling particular strands from them as a prelude to a healing process which involves removal and return of the curses (doora) to the enemy, and in this way reduces the client's psychological tension. Now, I will turn attention to shamanic practice in Balgan's Association, presenting the range of consultations I observed.

Chapter 2. The social context of curse accusations

2.1. Varieties of shamanic practice

Here, I present the range of rituals that Balgan and the other shamans of his Association performed. These are: 1) consultations concerned with curse-inflicted illness and misfortune (counter-cursing rituals) – the focus of this thesis; 2) consultations concerned with spirit-inflicted illness and misfortune, that is, misfortune inflicted by either ancestral or evil spirits; 3) divination; 4) rituals for sending off the soul of a deceased to the other world; 5) various kinds of cleansing; 6) the *dagylga* ritual which, according to custom, is performed from spring to autumn in sacred locations in the countryside, such as under a shamanic tree (*tel'yash*) or by a water-spring (*sug-bazhy*). Tuvans have a dagylga performed so as to request health and prosperity from the spirit-masters (*eeler*) of these locations.

I should add one more category, magical manipulation of a person through staring at a photo of him/her, a practice which a client orders for two reasons: first, to make somebody suffer in order to avenge a misdeed; second, to regain a spouse's love (this kind of "love magic" is ordered by abandoned wives). However, I must mention that I never observed this "love magic" being practised for a client, though Balgan told me that he has practised it for a great number of wives. By contrast, all the material about the above six types derives from my observations. I should note that this typology is not exclusive, in the sense that more than one of these categories may be involved in a single case; for example, divination of spirit/curse affliction proceeds to cleansing in the same consultation; after this, the client may order a dagylga, in order to secure the cleansing, which he received at the Association.

I must point out that type 1 (counter-cursing rituals), which this thesis examines, occupies a quantitatively minor portion in the repertoire of rituals which were practised in Balgan's Association during my research. According to my observations, these shamans were most often consulted for divination and ceremonies for conducting the soul of the dead to the other world. I did not systematically keep a record of these sessions, as they did not fall within my research interests; but I estimate that at least three clients per day would consult Balgan alone for divination and at least one client per day ordered a ritual from the Association to see off the soul of a dead relative. This means that Balgan alone divined for about 900 clients, while he and other shamans of his Association sent off 300 souls during the year of my fieldwork. An important number of clients (approximately

60) had a cleansing ritual performed in the Association, while approximately 10 of them ordered this ritual to be performed in their houses. The number of consultations concerned with curse affliction is, according to my estimation, similar to that of cleansing rituals. In Table 1 (section 2.5) I present 10 cases in which Balgan treated clients for curse affliction. To these we must add approximately 15 consultations with Balgan and cursed clients which I was not allowed to observe; and a small number of similar consultations from which I was absent (Balgan told me about these). Moreover, I observed a small number of such consultations involving several other shamans of the Association; yet it is highly probable that they treated many more cursed clients, if we take into account that my research was focused on Balgan.

I would like to dwell a bit on a fascinating feature, which emerges from the above numbers. Estimating the total of these figures, it appears that approximately 1,320 people consulted Balgan's Association in the course of one year. If we accept that each of these clients belongs to a family of at least four persons, it follows that the lives of 5,280 people were directly affected by consultations and ceremonies, which were performed by the shamans of only one out of the four Associations of Kyzyl! (I take the Russian-style, nuclear family as a standard unit of measure, though, as a rule, families of ethnic Tuvans include three to five children, while in exceptional cases the number of children may reach up to fifteen; if we take this difference into account and if we expand the size of the family including close relatives, the above number almost triples!). To this number we should add a round figure of 4,500 clients for the other three Associations of Kyzyl (1, 500 clients for each one of these three Associations; the slight increase in the figure of clients has to do with the fact that these Associations attract more clients than Balgan's Association). If so, it emerges that the lives of 18,000 people (if we take a family of only four as a standard of measure) were affected by these three Associations. We thus come to an impressive finding: in a population of 100,000 people the lives of 23,280 people – that is, more than 1/5 of the population of Kyzyl – were affected by the four shamanic Associations of Kyzyl! Having worked out the arithmetic of the consultations in all four shamanic Associations, the logical assumption holds that the ideological commitment to these Associations as mechanisms of managing anxiety induced by affliction with spirits or curses and of securing stability and wellbeing for the individual and his/her kin group is spread throughout a significant part of the population of Kyzyl.

Clients have to pay a fee for any type of ritual. A counter-cursing ritual, including cleansing, curse-removal and a cure, costs 400 rubles, while the price for divination and

cleansing as independent consultations is 100 rubles. I suspect that in a place where the average monthly wage is 4,000 rubles, the price for a counter-cursing ritual prohibits many people from consulting the Association (yet I must note that Balgan's Association offers the lowest prices compared to the other ones in Kyzyl). Dagylga and death-rituals are by far the most expensive ones, as their price reaches a month's wage. Their high price may be related to the fact that they are more or less fixed in the course of one's lifetime; one dagylga per year is enough to insure against misfortune, while the number of death-rituals that a family will need to order is limited to its members. Since I will deal with categories 1 and 2 in detail, I here outline the shamanic practices from categories 3 to 5.

2.2 *Khuvaanak* (divination)

We must distinguish between divination as part of a counter-cursing consultation and divination as an independent consultation. In the latter case, khuvaanak (or *tolge*) deals with such concerns as employment, marriage, and finding lost objects or people. To mention several cases: Balgan divined for a girl and her mother wanting to learn whether the girl's imminent marriage would be a happy one; for a young woman, who inquired about the disappearance of her mentally retarded mother; for a girl wanting to learn if she would pass her university exam; and for a foreign student wanting to learn whether his doctoral research would be successfully concluded. In all these divinations Balgan gave the typical response: *azhyrbas* (fine) and *eki tur* (everything will be all right). Yet in the student's case he also predicted that the road to success would be extremely arduous; this shows that this standard divinatory response may be complemented by elaborations that fit the circumstances of a given case (it seems that Balgan quite reasonably assumed that the successful completion of a doctoral thesis is an extremely difficult task).

Khuvaanak is practised with forty-one stones; most of them are black, while only a few of them white. All these stones must be collected from the embankments of many different rivers for accuracy in divination to be achieved. I was told that there is a number of typical patterns, according to which khuvaanak is practised. Of these I observed two, those that Balgan practised; yet I was told that each shaman might improvise a variation of one of the typical patterns. The two patterns that I observed involve: 1) arranging the stones in three parallel columns (I call this "three-road divination") or collecting them in the palms and throwing them randomly on a purple mat (I call this "random divination"). Balgan mentioned a pattern of random divination, which is given a standard meaning: if

the pattern of two white stones touching each other emerges, this is a symbol of imminent marriage. This divinatory precept reflects a major concern of Tuvan life, the expectation of getting married and ultimately of acquiring descendants.

In consultations concerned with curse affliction, a divination is always performed twice: first, in the beginning, in order to uncover the perpetrator or the circumstances of affliction; second, at the end, in order to verify the findings of the first divination and to reveal whether the curses have been removed. Balgan mentioned two patterns of divinatory outcomes, which are given a standard meaning. First, if the "three road" divination ends with three stones in the upper part of each of the three columns, this means that the client is afflicted with a very powerful curse. It is a symbol of incapacitation and closure; in this case, the typical expression is "*doroga zakryta*" ("road closed", in Russian). This pattern appeared in most of Balgan's three-road divinations, something that possibly suggests that the arrangement of the stones can be manipulated. In such cases, Balgan would tell the clients that three cleansing or curing sessions had to take place. Second, if the "random" method produces a particular pattern, a single white stone surrounded by many black ones, this means that the client is afflicted with the curses of various enemies. This also symbolises incapacitation and closure. Now, this pattern is not so random, taking into account that most of the stones are black and only a few of them white. So, the outcome can rarely be anything else but white stones surrounded by black ones. Thus, these two divinatory precepts reflect an additional, and perhaps the most pervasive, concern of Tuvan life, fear or suspicion of affliction with curses.

Though the mastery of the divinatory techniques is a prerequisite for professional practice, there is an even more critical faculty, which only charismatic individuals like Balgan (as he himself put it) possess: intuition. In his own words: "Each time I divine, I do not look at the stones but at the client's eyes, and I see what his worries are. Let him look at the stones, I perform to attract his attention; I look at him and this way I divine". But he confided a divinatory tip, which contrasts with his notion of intuition: "If the client is a woman, we say that an evil woman, a neighbour or relative, has cursed her". To the most incredulous, this might sound as cheap fraud. Yet it reveals another major concern of contemporary Tuvan life: suspiciousness of one's relatives and friends as the agents of curse affliction.

2.3. Sending off the soul of the deceased[1]

Before I present the ritual procedure, a brief review of the beliefs related to the posthumous fate of the soul is necessary. The metaphysics of death in Tuvan shamanism does not only include the idea widespread in Asia, of the dead person's unwillingness to forsake the world of the living due to attachment to his/her relatives or material possessions[2]. In Tuva this concept co-exists with the Buddhist notions of emancipation and rebirth[3]. Marina Mongush, writing on the history of Buddhism in Tuva, notes that after death the soul departs to the realm of *Tyvaazhan*, which is located between the earth and the upper world, *Ustuu Oran* (2001: 168)[4]. Tyvaazhan is divided into two compartments: *Shambal* and *Tamy*, where the souls of virtuous and evil people reside respectively. The master of Tyvaazhan, Erlik, decides in conjunction with the master of the upper world, *Kurbustu*, to which of these compartments a soul will be dispatched (ibid. 2001: 168).

In the Buddhist (Tibetan) tradition, after death the soul enters a transitional phase, *bardo*: a state of existence between death and rebirth. During this interval, a shaman or a lama (Buddhist priest) addresses the soul, sünezin, in two rituals performed on the 7th and the 49th day after death (ibid. 2001: 169). In the first, the soul is informed of its departure to the other world, a process that is conducted in the second (nowadays most Tuvans hold only the second rite which is the most critical one, due to inability to cover the expenses for both rites). I observed a small number of Balgan's sessions for the 49th day[5]. The relatives threw offerings of vodka and food on a fire lit on the bank of Yenisei river (on the outskirts of Kyzyl). After performing kamlaniye to send off the soul, Balgan used to relay to those present the dead person's parting words to his/her relatives. On one occasion, he relayed that the dead held a grudge against some of his relatives who were present at the ritual, something that possibly indicates a tension between them and their

[1] In his classic survey of Siberian shamanism, Eliade uses the term *psychopomp* to describe the shaman's function of escorting the soul of the deceased to the other world (1964: 205-14). This term originates from the Greek mythological figure of *psychopompos*, which refers to Hermes, the conductor of newly deceased souls to the afterlife.

[2] See Vitebsky 1993, for the tribal Sora of India; Eliade 1964: 207, for several Siberian examples.

[3] Yet the idea of attachment to earthly motivations exists also in Buddhism.

[4] Balgan told me that after death the soul goes to Erlik Oran (Erlik's World), which is located under the earth.

[5] Though I initially intended to collect data on these rituals, I soon gave up for reasons related to my safety. It was customary on these occasions to hold a dinner in commemoration of the dead with the participation of relatives, Balgan and me. But in all the dinners I attended the situation went literally out of control, as drunken relatives attacked each other. In my experience, the ethnographer will sooner or later become the target of aggression on these occasions. I was interested in the phenomenon of violence among relatives, but on second thoughts I decided not to engage in it any further.

(once living) relative (Balgan had a blood relation to this family, so it is very likely that he knew the tensions between its members). According to the shaman Maadyr, negligence to give the deceased a psychopomp ritual – which sometimes falls beyond the capacity of a meagre familial budget – amounts to insulting the soul, which bounces back with a vengeance by afflicting its relatives with illness or misfortune[6].

2.4. *Aryglaar*[7] (cleansing/purification)

Cleansing can be performed either on the individual or on his/her possessions. As regards the latter, I observed the following kinds of cleansing: *bazhyng-aryglaar* (house-cleansing), *mashina-aryglaar* (car-cleansing) and *aksha-aryglaar* (money-cleansing). Aryglaar can be performed without a particular reason; several clients told me that it is customary to order such a ritual a couple of times per year. Yet there are two exceptions. First, a cleansing is performed in the house of the client, after the latter has seen (or sensed the presence of) the spirit of a dead relative or an evil spirit. Balgan and other shamans of the Association told me that the spirit of the dead wanders in the house of its living relatives, in cases where the latter ones have not sent it off to the other world; in this case, the shaman has to cleanse the house which has been polluted by the presence of the dead, and send off the soul in a separate ritual. As regards evil spirits, there seems to be no explanation why they haunt a house. Second, a client orders a cleansing in his/her house or business place or car in order to ward off a curse. Thus, aryglaar can be performed either as a separate ritual or as part of death and counter-cursing rituals.

The practice of aryglaar involves the use of juniper incense (*artysh*) in circles around the client's body[8]. During this process, Balgan used to pronounce a recitation[9], and at the end he would tie a pair of threads to the client's wrists as a protection (*sagyyzyn* or *kamgalal*). Milk is believed to have cleansing properties, and it is used in aryglaar. Balgan performed two styles of cleansing with the use of milk. In the first, he dipped a piece of juniper in a bowl filled with milk and sprinkled the client with it. In the second, the client was given a bowl filled with milk to hold, while Balgan performed kamlaniye.

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[6] We will see Balgan expressing this belief in section 4.5.
[7] Verb, which means: "to cleanse, purify". This practice should not be confused with kamlaniye which is also practised for cleansing the client from curses.
[8] For instance, see section 5.2.
[9] For instance, see section 5.2.

2.5. Presentation of a sample of selected cases

Table 1 (p. 60) presents a sample of cases concerned with spirit affliction and curse affliction. I have divided these cases into two clusters, the first one including cases of spirit affliction (2.5.1) and the second including cases of curse affliction (2.5.2). This division is somewhat arbitrary, since clients afflicted with curses are subject to spirit affliction (or they may have already suffered from it) and vice versa. I have excluded the other types of rituals, since I am concerned with affliction as such and with the possibility of a shift from spirit affliction to curse affliction as an explanation of misfortune in post-Soviet Tuva. The Table presents basic information about the clients and their social background, as well as information about the kind of misfortune (e.g., illness or insanity), the type of cause (curse affliction or spirit affliction), the agent behind the affliction (e.g., female relative or ancestral spirit) and the latter's motive for affliction (e.g., antipathy or attachment). I formulated this table in accordance with a relevant table of accusations of witchcraft in Rhodesia by Crawford (1967). This table cannot be regarded as a total statistical survey; inevitably, I have had to list the cases on which I was able to gather the most coherent data. Nonetheless, I believe that these cases give an overall representative picture of the range and incidence of Balgan's caseload.

Table 1. Sample of cases concerned with spirit affliction and curse affliction

Gender	Age	Domicile	Profession	Ethnicity	Problem	Cause	Agent	Motive
1. Female	65-70	Province	Teacher	Tuvan	High pressure	Curses	Female Relative	Antipathy
2. Female	3-5	Kyzyl	Inapplicable	Tuvan	Schizophrenia	Spirit-affliction	Satan	Unknown
3. Female	17-20	Kyzyl	Student	Tuvan	Headache	Curses	Ex-boyfriend	Frustration
4. Female	35-40	Kyzyl	Unknown	Tuvan	Migraines	Spirit-affliction	Dead father	Attachment
5. Male	45-50	Kyzyl	Former engineer	Tuvan	Nervous debility	Physical trauma + curses	Hooligans + woman	(For cursing): Unknown
6. Female	45-50	Kyzyl	Unknown	Tuvan	Husband alcoholic	Spirit-affliction	Chetker	Unknown
7. Female	40-50	Kyzyl	Unknown	Tuvan	Alcoholism	Spirit-affliction	Chetker	Unknown
8. Male	40-45	Kyzyl	Canteen Proprietor	Central Asian	Business problems	Curses	Female worker	Antipathy
9. Couple	60-70	Province	Herders	Tuvan	Cattle epidemic	Curses	Opposed herders	Pasture-use
10. Female	20-25	Province	Unknown	Tuvan	Mental problems	Spirit-affliction	Ancestral shaman	Initiation
11. Female	35-40	Kyzyl	Unknown	Tuvan	Headache	Spirit-affliction	Dead husband	Attachment
12. Female	35-40	Kyzyl	Unknown	Russian	Husband alcoholic	Curses	Evil woman	Antipathy
13. Couple	35-40	Kyzyl	Shop-proprietors	Tuvan	Business problems	Curses	Female relative	Antipathy
14. Male	50-55	Kyzyl	Investor	Russian	Bankruptcy/ Illness	Alcoholism + curses	Business-partners	Embezzlement
15. Female	55-60	Kyzyl	Unknown	Russian	Loss of property/son dead/illness	Curses	Ex-husband	Expropriation of property/ Sexual rejuvenation
16. Female	32	Kyzyl	Accountant	Tuvan	Loss of job/ partner and illness	Curses	Employer and others	Envy/Antipathy

2.5.1. Cluster 1: cases of spirit affliction

The cluster of spirit affliction includes cases 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 11. In case 2 the clients are a little Tuvan girl and her mother. The mother, a cleaner in a public service, told Balgan that her daughter was screaming without an obvious reason. She had taken her to the psychiatric hospital, where the doctors diagnosed schizophrenia. Balgan objected to this diagnosis, saying that her fits were due to demonic affliction – to my astonishment, Satan[10]. But an even more mysterious feature appeared during the consultation: the girl had been born with a scar on her left arm, which dimly formed the number 16. Balgan concluded that she was bound to die at the age of 16, unless the evil was driven away. He claimed that a ritual at the Association would not drive Satan away, since, as he said, he was even more powerful than evil spirits such as chetkerler. Instead, he had to perform a ritual in the woman's house exactly at 12 midnight, when Satan turns up, as he said. As far as I know, this ritual never took place, because the woman could not afford the fee of 500 rubles, which Balgan required[11].

In case 4 the client is a Tuvan woman, whom Balgan treated for migraines. In the consultation she briefly relayed her biography at Balgan's request. Balgan concluded that the spirit of her father, who had died recently, had afflicted her with migraines out of attachment to her. This way he wanted to take his daughter with him to the other world. Balgan treated her by massaging her head. In early June Balgan performed a dagylga ritual for this woman and her family in a water spring, close to their place of origin. There, this woman told me that the headaches had disappeared after the cure at the Association.

In case 6 the client is a middle-aged Tuvan woman, who consulted Balgan about her husband's addiction to alcohol. Balgan explained her husband's alcoholism as the result of affliction by chetkerler (evil spirits). In case 7, the client is a middle-aged Tuvan woman who was working in a local factory producing vodka. The woman mentioned that during her employment she became addicted to vodka. Balgan explained her problem as a result of affliction by chetkerler. In both these cases, he performed kamlaniye to cleanse the clients from the chetkerler.

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[10] His reference to Satan may be explained by the fact that the day before this session, in a discussion I had with Balgan on evil spirits, I told him that, as a child, I was interested in Satan. Perhaps Balgan intended to acknowledge our discussion in this way.

[11] I myself offered to pay the fee, partly because I was moved by the drama of the mother and her child and partly because I thought that such a ritual would be somewhat special, since Satan was involved in it. But I told Balgan about this decision after they had left. I searched this woman in her workplace, but to no avail.

In case 10 the client is a young Tuvan woman, who mentioned that she was seized by fits. Listening to her biography, Balgan concluded that the fits were caused by the spirit of her shaman grandmother, who intended this way to lead her granddaughter to become a shaman. The girl came to the Association with her aunt, who was living in Kyzyl. Balgan agreed to visit the girl in the village where she lived, and instruct her to master her grandmother's spirit.

Case 11 is similar to case 4. A mature Tuvan woman mentioned headaches. From her biography Balgan concluded that the spirit of her dead husband had afflicted her out of attachment to her. All these clients were unwilling to be interviewed by me.

2.5.2. Cluster 2: cases of curse affliction

The cluster of curse affliction includes cases 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. In case 1 the client is an elder Tuvan woman from a remote district, a teacher by profession, who told Balgan that she had high blood pressure and that she had had a quarrel with a female relative, during which the latter cursed her. Balgan diagnosed that her pressure resulted from this curse. At the end of the consultation, I asked Balgan what the cause of the quarrel was, but the only response I received was that this relative disliked the client. Interestingly, this woman gave me her address (she was temporarily staying with some relatives in Kyzyl), something that made me hope that I had found an informant willing to discuss her case. I visited the house twice, but I did not find her there. Finally, I came across her on the street, but it was only a few moments before her departure.

In case 3 the client is a young Tuvan girl, who consulted Balgan with her aunt. The girl, whose family lived in a remote district, was studying in a college in Kyzyl. The girl complained about persistent headaches for about six months. In the beginning of the consultation, I asked her aunt what the cause of the problem was, and she replied that it was unknown (*neisvestnaya*, in Russian). But in the course of the consultation the girl, obviously embarrassed, confided that she had a fight with her boyfriend, who cursed her, because she wanted to leave him. During a night, some weeks after the break up, the girl saw a grey humanlike shade in her room in the college dormitory. This frightened her a lot and the headaches became more intense ever since. Balgan concluded that this was the soul (sünezin) of her ex-boyfriend, who was still interested in her. The treatment consisted in massaging the girl's head. Balgan told the clients that three sessions had to take place in order to remove the curses. The second session took place the following day, but, to my knowledge, no third session took place, because the clients never

returned. This puzzled me, because in the second session the girl told me that she was feeling much better; it could be that she took the improvement of her condition as a sign of permanent cure and, therefore, decided not to continue the treatment.

In case 5 the client is a middle-aged Tuvan man, whom Balgan treated for a nervous debility. The man told me that he had been unable to walk properly or stand on his feet ever since street criminals assaulted him, beating him on the head. This was the third time this year that Balgan was treating him. Balgan told me that this man's problem reappears due to energy-exhaustion: Balgan gives him energy during a session (the treatment involved a massage on his head); the energy is exhausted, as the client is walking, something that leads to debility; as a result, a whole circle of accumulation and exhaustion begins anew[12]. The client, formerly working as a car engineer, was forced to retire due to his problem. In our interview, he mentioned that soon after the attack, he had surgery at the hospital, which, however, did not completely restore his ability to walk. He consulted a healer from Kyrgyzstan, who massaged his head with marmot fat. This treatment had some effects. As he claimed, his ability to walk was fully restored after Balgan's treatment. However, this case has an additional dimension: soon after the treatment, Balgan told me that the client's problem had been exacerbated because a woman had cursed him. In our interview, the client mentioned that he had had a quarrel with a woman, who cursed him, but, in his opinion, this did not impinge on his condition.

In case 8, the client is a mature man from an Islamic State of Central Asia[13], who lived with his family in Kyzyl and owned a canteen in a college. This man told Balgan that his business was not going well. As responsible for this he held a young woman of the same nationality with him, whom he employed in his workplace; he believed that this woman was doing magiya[14] against him out of antipathy. Balgan performed kamlaniye in this man's workplace in order to expel the curses[15]. The people who attended the session were this man and his family, the ethnographer and, interestingly, the enemy herself. I noticed that, before the kamlaniye began, the man was looking very stressed and took some deep breaths. I came to know this man quite well; he was a hospitable person and we used to drink together and talk about his life in the State of his origin during the

[12] In our conversation a week after this cure, the client disagreed with Balgan's understanding of his case and claimed that his condition had been steadily improving ever since Balgan treated him.
[13] For reasons of confidentiality, I cannot be more specific as to which this country is.
[14] This term refers to "black magic" (section 1.6).
[15] Balgan's diagnosis of the client's misfortune in terms of curse affliction does not imply a differentiation from this client's assertions of being afflicted with magiya. As we saw, for Balgan "curse" and "magiya" are synonymous (section 1.6).

Soviet years and about his life in Russia. He described life in the Soviet years as cheap and affluent, and mentioned that the post-Soviet poverty, which plagued his country, had forced him to migrate to Russia in search of a better future. One of the most noticeable moments of our interaction was when he observed that we both were *inostrantsy* (foreigners, in Russian). This happened after I told him about my difficulties with the visa (section 1.4); my interlocutor went on relaying the bureaucratic complications that burdened his business, something that reaffirms my argument that discussing one's field-induced tensions with informants yields valuable insights into the informants' anxieties[16]. Interestingly, some days after the kamlaniye, things had been reversed: this man's business had improved, whereas the sorcerer had been hospitalised due to an illness which the doctors could not identify. The client took this as a sign that the curses had been returned to her.

In case 9 the clients are a couple of Tuvan herders who had lost many of their livestock due to an epidemic. They accused another couple of herders, who were living a short distance from them, of curse affliction. The reason for this, as they claimed, was a conflict concerning the use of the pasture which lay between their camps. According to them, their enemies had commissioned a shaman to curse them. Balgan identified this shaman by means of divination[17], and performed kamlaniye around the camp to expel the curses. The performance was also attended by the couple's children, who had come from Kyzyl for that purpose. I was struck that, despite the unfortunate incident, a mood of gaiety prevailed among the members of the family; sometimes the performance was interspersed with laughter.

In case 12 the client is a mature Russian woman, whose husband, a driver by profession and a heavy drinker, had had a serious traffic accident which nearly cost him his life. The woman accused another woman known to her of affliction with curses, which, according to her, caused the accident. Balgan confirmed this by means of divination and performed kamlaniye in her house to expel the curses. In case 13 the clients are a couple of Tuvans who were facing problems with the shop they run. They ascribed their problem to a female relative of theirs, who, as they claimed, had cursed them (the unusual aspect of this consultation was that the female client confessed after

[16] See section 1.4.

[17] I was incredibly fortunate to meet this shaman a few weeks after this ritual. I avoided discussing this case with him, fearing that a conflict would erupt between all those involved, something that would bring about unpleasant complications for my research. Yet I must note that this shaman was a very pleasant person and he imparted extremely interesting things about his initiation.

Balgan's interrogation that she had secretly cursed this relative; Balgan scolded her, asking her not to repeat this). In case 14 the client is a middle-aged Russian man, who suspected his business partners of manipulating him by means of cursing him and offering vodka to him, in order to embezzle his money. In case 15 the client is a middle-aged Russian woman, who was involved in a legal dispute with her ex-husband over ownership of property (her ex-husband had sold one of their houses and kept the profit for himself without returning to her a share, as they had agreed). She accused her ex-husband of having made her ill by means of commissioning shamans to curse her. Yet this woman had suffered an even more serious misfortune: her son had died. Balgan divined that his death was due to shamanic cursing, which her ex-husband had ordered in order to magically extract the vitality of his own son and spend it in his new life with his much younger mistress. Now, the client desired to have her ex-husband punished; hence her recourse to a shaman. Additionally, she had appealed to the court of justice[18]. In case 16 the client is a mature Tuvan woman, who accused her ex-employer of having commissioned shamans to curse her, something that, in her view, led her to lose her partner, her job, and to fall seriously ill. The last three cases constitute the ethnographic body of this thesis – chapters 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

2.6. Discussion

I argued that presenting the social contexts, in which curse accusations occur, reveals that Balgan's "starvation-theory" is one of a number of diverse interpretations of curse-inflicted misfortune, which he employs for each of his clients (section 1.1). In none of the cases of cluster 2 is starvation the motive for cursing. Instead, the most prominent motive for cursing is antipathy; it appears in half of them (1, 8, 12, 13, 16). In three of these cases (1, 3, 5) the client is directly confronted with the enemy's curses during a quarrel: in case 1 the client is cursed by a relative of hers; in case 3 the client is cursed by her boyfriend after her demand for a break-up; in case five the client is cursed by a woman (I have no data as to what the motive is in this case). In the rest of these cases (8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) the client's accusation is based on a subjective experience of curse affliction. Though the data do not allow me to be more specific as to this experience for each case, I think that it can be described as a suspicion or conviction of being cursed. At least, this is what I can certainly tell for two cases, about which I managed to elicit

[18] See section 3.3, where I examine the court and shamanic action as a means of redressing a problem.

relevant data: the client of case 8 was certain that he had been cursed and that it was a particular individual who had cursed him; by contrast, the client of case 16 expressed suspicions of affliction with curses by her employer during my detailed questioning about an incident of cursing she relayed[19] (yet in our conversations she was convinced that her employer had cursed her). Except for this case, I have no data as to whether accusations in these cases[20] have an "objective" basis, e.g., an incident, which engendered suspicion or conviction of curse affliction; the client of case 16 will interpret as an indication of curse affliction what might otherwise seem to be a coincidence of unrelated events (see section 5.4).

In cases 9, 15, 16, the clients believed that their enemies commissioned shamans to curse them (this also emerged from Balgan's divination for each client). This indicates that these clients believed that their enemies intended to seriously harm or even kill them, since cursing is more devastating when it comes from a shaman who is commissioned for this purpose[21]. In case 9 this intention has a rational basis, taking into account the nature of the motive involved: the enemies had an interest in causing the victims' death, since this would enable them to expropriate the pasture which – according to the clients – they coveted. In 15 the enemy absorbs his son's vitality by employing shamans to curse him to death. Here, curse affliction is also led by a utilitarian motive, though one which belongs to the order of subjective experience: rejuvenation as a result of expropriating the vitality of a young man for enhancing one's own sexual performance. By contrast, in 16 the enemy does not gain any material benefit from employing shamans to kill the victim; what she probably gains is psychological satisfaction as a result of canalising her antipathy for the victim through shamanic cursing. In case 15 the hiring of shamans to curse the target (the son) ends up lethal for the latter; by contrast, in cases 9 and 16 the shamans' curses cause serious disturbances to their targets. We can imagine that in case 16 the effects of the curses on the victim – illness, loss of job and partner – increased the enemy's satisfaction.

Nevertheless, assuming that this enemy indeed commissioned a shaman to curse the victim to death, did she experience a satisfaction (or reduction of tension) similar to the one she would experience if she physically murdered the victim herself? I assume she did not for two reasons. First, because the satisfaction she would draw from murdering

[19] I present this incident in section 5.4.
[20] I am referring to cases: 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16, as above.
[21] See section 1.6.

with her own hands the person she hates cannot be reproduced – at least in the same intensity – by means of shamanic cursing, that is, a practice where the victim is in most cases only symbolically killed (without this implying that death cannot occur as a result of cursing; one can also die of anxiety of being cursed). Second, the victim did not die. But the fact that this enemy canalised her antipathy for the victim into commissioning a shaman-killer instead of commissioning an actual killer or committing murder herself reveals an exceptionally interesting aspect of the enemy's behaviour in fulfilment of her intention. That is, by resorting to shamanic cursing instead of actual homicide, the enemy cannot be certain that the victim will die, yet she is free from certain unpleasant legal consequences following homicide; Soviet law does not recognise magiya (magic) and cursing as a crime.

In my view, what cases 9, 15, 16 indicate is that commissioning shamanic curses to kill or seriously injure is an idiom provided by Tuvan culture for the externalisation of murderous motives in a way other than overt practice of premeditated crime. I adopt this idea from Obeyesekere's discussion of retaliatory sorcery[22] in Sri Lanka (1975). The thrust of his argument is: the premise of criminological research in Sri Lanka that spontaneous and unpremeditated crime outweighs premeditated is inaccurate, if we take into account the high incidence of sorcery which is functionally isomorphic to premeditated crime; that is, it may function as a substitute for premeditated crime, as it permits the expression of murderous drives equally well (1975: 2 ff.). In Sri Lanka (and perhaps in any part of the world where sorcery is practised), resorting to one of the thousands of available sorcerers involves as much planning and calculation as premeditated crime does – and possibly as much satisfaction as the latter. The picture of crime in Sri Lanka, as this emerges from criminological studies, changes dramatically if sorcery is treated as isomorphic to premeditated crime; the incidence of the latter far exceeds spontaneous crime. I have no empirical evidence that shamans in Tuva are commissioned to murder with curses (and, by extension, I cannot estimate the incidence of this practice). But if shamanic cursing indeed occurs, it seems to me that it allows individuals driven by a utilitarian motive (cases 9 and 15) or by antipathy (case 16) to achieve their harmful purpose with minimal risk and inconvenience (cf. Obeyesekere 1975: 19)[23]. If these three cases display the commonest reasons for dispute in Tuva, the

[22] For a definition of sorcery, see section 1.6.
[23] See also Kapferer (1997: 44), for a relevant observation concerning the practice of sorcery in Sri Lanka.

social importance of the practice of shamanic cursing is revealed: it canalises harmful intentions from overt expression of violence to a covert and subtle pathway, which entails minimal risk for the aggressor and may perhaps sometimes be as satisfying as actual murder, as far as effectiveness in causing death is concerned.

A common feature exists in all the cases in both clusters 1 and 2: in each consultation the explanation of misfortune is derived from the client's particular circumstances. Actually, in the cluster of curse affliction Balgan does not have to elicit the explanation, since this is provided by the client him/herself (the only exception is case 3, where Balgan probes into the girl's personal life due to her resistance to revealing the cause of her problem). In these cases, the divination which Balgan performs to discover the cause of misfortune, confirms the client's suspicion or assertion of curse affliction[24]. But let us see the cluster of spirit affliction, where several standard patterns of explanation seem to emerge. First, in cases 6 and 7 Balgan ascribes the clients' problem (alcoholism) to affliction by evil spirits (chetker). Second, in cases 4 and 11 he ascribes the clients' problem (migraines and headache respectively) to affliction by an ancestral spirit. Third, in case 10 he ascribes the client's fits to affliction by the spirit of a shaman-ancestor. In the last three cases Balgan identifies the cause of the clients' misfortunes on the basis of information he elicits from them: in cases 4 and 11 the clients' father and husband respectively are dead, while in case 10 a shaman-ancestor exists in the client's family. That is, Balgan draws on these clients' personal circumstances in order to explain their misfortunes. In the cases of curse affliction, explanation is derived from the context of social tensions in which the client is involved: tense or ambiguous relations between the client and a relative or friend or colleague. I surmise that his explanation of spirit affliction in cases 4 and 11 reflects a similar tension between the client and her once alive father and husband respectively; lack of data on these clients' biographies does not allow me to test this hypothesis.

Nevertheless, how does his "starvation theory" fit the pattern of curse-inflicted misfortune? As mentioned, Balgan contended that "starvation" and envy lead Tuvans to curse their better-off relatives and friends (section 1.1). His theory found application to my own case (the reader will recall my interest in learning cursing incantations[25]), after I told him about the problems of survival I was facing in Kyzyl. In his own words: "You

[24] See section 3.4, on divination as a strategy of validating the client's suspicions.
[25] See sections 1.4 and 1.6.

have a tendency for cursing, because you starve". Balgan probably took my interest in curses as a sign that I wanted to use this knowledge in order to externalise aggression caused by hunger. So, in my own case – just as in the cases of clusters 1 and 2 – Balgan drew the explanation of my tensions (a tendency for cursing, as he understood these tensions) from my personal circumstances, my narrative of starving in Kyzyl.

As I noted, the ten cases of curse affliction presented in Table 1 are a mere fraction of a total of approximately 60 cases of this kind, which I estimate to have taken place in Balgan's Association during my fieldwork. Undoubtedly, such consultations took place in the other three Associations of Kyzyl, I assume, even more frequently than in my field-site, since these Associations are better known to the public and they attract larger numbers of clients. To these we should add consultations for curse affliction which must have taken place in the several other Associations existing in provincial towns in Tuva. All this means that probably several hundreds of such consultations took place throughout Tuva in the year of my fieldwork. Furthermore, I suspect that this figure is but a fraction of a diffuse operation of suspiciousness and accusation of curse affliction which I interpret as a repercussion of socio-economic pressures pertaining to the post-Soviet transition, which have engendered mistrust among Tuvans. A study of herders (yak and sheep) in Mongun-Taiga (western Tuva) at the time of post-Soviet transition shows that lack of trust between different families prohibited cooperating in the tending of large flocks, something that was practised in the past (Humphrey 1989: 8, cf. 2002c). It may be that separation and mistrust could have led to suspicions or accusations of curse affliction among these herders. But my point is that most of the cases of curse affliction in Table 1 (8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16) represent extreme examples of this operation of social dysfunction, which necessitate recourse to a shaman. That is, they are the observable edges of a nexus, which contains thousands of individuals suspecting their friends, relatives and co-workers of curse affliction, a nexus enshrouded in secrecy. Many of these suspicions may have reached the observable level of open accusation during and after my fieldwork, but there is no way to document their incidence statistically. Whether an individual will progress from suspicion to accusation is contingent on the number of psychic reserves which he/she can spend in the prolongation of a tense or ambiguous relationship; an accusation probably erupts at the critical point, when one's reserves have been exhausted and an externalisation of suspicions is uncontrolled. But this cannot be predetermined theoretically; it must be demonstrated ethnographically. As we shall see, the client of case 16 is such an example: for a prolonged amount of time, she explores the

margins of her ambiguous relation with her employer, suspecting the latter of curse affliction, and only after the tension has escalated beyond the margins does she react with an accusation (which, nevertheless, is never voiced in front of the employer).

2.7. Conclusion

The above then leads me to suggest that there is currently a strong flow of curse accusations, which, I suspect, may be steadily increasing as interpersonal tension transcends the border of coexistence. Though the factors leading to conflict are intrinsic to each case, cases 14 and 15 show that curse accusation can be instigated by kinds of tension, which are possible only within the post-Soviet socio-economic environment. In case 14 the client's curse accusation against his professional partners is based on the fear that they have embezzled his money; as we shall see (section 3.8), the danger of fraud by one's business partners is very high in the world of privatised entrepreneurships which has emerged after the fall of the socialist monopoly. Likewise, in case 15 the conflict between the client and her ex-husband, which gives rise to a curse accusation against the latter, revolves around another aspect of privatisation in post-Soviet Russia, property (in the Soviet period property was State-owned). These two cases indicate new forms of precariousness and tensions related to post-Soviet developments, which contribute to the operation of suspiciousness and accusations of curse affliction in Tuva. Furthermore, I conjecture that the current incidence of curse accusations is higher compared to the pre-Soviet and Soviet times owing to the impact of post-socialist precariousness on relations such as those of cases 14 and 15. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that this premise is not provable, since the sample of Table 1 is only a snapshot – admittedly an incomplete one – of the kinds of affliction in one of several shamanic Associations in Tuva in the course of one year; thus, it lacks the depth of time, which a study of any shift in the incidence of curse accusations during different periods would require.

Chapter 3. Symbolic healing and shamanic transformation under post-socialism

1st case study: *Yuri's suspicions*

3.1. Introductory note

I present information on the client's misfortune in the process of discovery (I have briefly introduced this case on p. 65). First, I relay the events related to this consultation; then, I move on to discussing a number of issues emerging from it. I have divided the discussion into two Parts. In Part I, I discuss various aspects of the consultation (though I supplement analysis with material from the sample of cursed clients in Table 1, as well as from conversations with other Tuvan informants of mine). I start with probing into the causes leading these people to select the shamanic Association as a means of redressing a misfortune at the expense of bureaucratic mechanisms available in Kyzyl (section 3.3). Balgan's divination of curse affliction is crucial to this distinction; I take up this issue in section 3.4, where I show how the divinatory process constructs the client's image as the victim of an enemy's curses (this is a provisional conclusion, for I plan to subvert it in section 3.8). The analysis of divination will lead us to identify a striking analogy between Balgan and the client of this consultation; based on this (as well as on additional material on shamanic consultations), I shall put forward what I believe to be a new argument regarding the nature of shamanism in the post-Soviet age: by contrast with the pre-Soviet pattern of shamanic initiation, involving an esoteric experience of election or affliction by an ancestral spirit or a terrible spiritual force, ordinary misfortunes can now provide the impetus for higher levels of initiation on the path of the shaman, who is then related to his clients on the basis of similar misfortunes (3.5). I will further explore this transformative process in relation to a curative symbolism appearing in this consultation; drawing on two shamans' psychobiographies (Balgan's and Maadyr's), I shall suggest that their interpretation of this symbolism as "hope" for the client reflects their transition from misfortune to shamanic transformation (3.6).

In Part II the discussion moves on from the specifics of this consultation to the broader post-socialist context, within which contemporary accusations of curse affliction appear and transformation into a shaman occurs in Tuva. Section 3.7 makes the transition from Part I to II and introduces the reader to the discussion following. Here, I establish the existence of a post-Soviet operation of mistrust and enmity, which in Tuva is expressed through curse accusations. This leads me to identify these accusations – as well as the symbolic transformation I see in Balgan's life-story – as elements of the Tuvan

repertoire of the imagination, that is, cultural patterns of thinking that people in Tuva employ to respond to social change. In section 3.8 I take the reader on a brief (but comprehensive) tour through the expansive universe of mistrust, deceit and acquisitiveness in post-socialist Russia; I establish that the analogy between Balgan and the client of this consultation is a repercussion of the post-socialist transition and present an example of antagonistic relations in Tuva, which subverts the image of the shaman's client as a victim of curses (3.4), since it shows that the client can also be an agent of curse affliction (for somebody else), contributing thus to a cycle of curse accusations. In the last section (3.9), I direct the reader to an aspect of the sociological context of Russia, friendship and exchange as a means of survival, sketching out a model of transition from anxiety in the face of the State during the Soviet years to the diffusion of this anxiety and mistrust among one's friends and relatives. In the final part of this section, I focus on the Tuvan case as a cultural particularity within post-Soviet Russia, showing how Balgan has converted his misfortunes into signs of transformation by employing an element of the Tuvan repertoire of the imagination, namely, shamanic initiation.

3.2. The consultation

I arrived at the Association when the second part of the consultation was about to begin. At that time, a Russian middle-aged man was leaving a bunch of artysh (juniper), a bottle of milk, and, curiously enough, a candle on Balgan's desk. Immediately, the two first ritual items engendered in my mind a representation I was familiar with by that time[1], aryglaar (cleansing). Not so with the candle, something that led me to think that this cleansing would be different from the aryglaar which Balgan was used to performing.

At my request after this consultation was over, Balgan relayed the events of the first part, which I had missed[2]. The client (I will call him Yuri) suspected his business-partners of having embezzled his money. Yuri had invested big money in a construction business after the managers promised him quick enrichment. Soon, his investment in the business led to a close friendship with the managers. Yuri, a divorced man, was spending

[1] By June of 2003, when this consultation took place, I had completed eight months in the field and had observed countless cleansing rituals.

[2] Unlike dagylga rituals (section 2.1), consultations at the Association are not normally pre-arranged. Therefore, it is impossible to know when a client is planning to come to the Association. It seemed to me that the only way to come up to this situation was to be present at the Association from early morning till late afternoon on a daily basis. This was practically impossible, since basic needs, such as having lunch, sometimes forced me to intervals not longer than 30 minutes. The first part of the consultation with the Russian client took place around 2 p.m., when I had just sorted out a problem concerning the transference of funds to my bank in Kyzyl.

most of his evenings drinking vodka with his new friends at their invitation. In these sessions, his partners persuaded him to put more money in the business, promising enormous returns. However, a year had gone by, but Yuri had not received any profit. What was worse, a few weeks before he came to the Association, Yuri had been diagnosed as suffering from liver-cancer as a result of chronic drinking. Yuri believed that his partners manipulated him by taking advantage of his susceptibility to drink and by cursing him. Now he wanted to avenge himself of his partners' misdeeds. To this end, he brought with him a photo of himself with one of his partners and asked Balgan to punish him by supernatural means.

Balgan performed "three-road" divination to discover the cause behind Yuri's misfortunes. The process was completed with the direst possible arrangement: three stones in the upper part of all three roads. For Yuri, therefore, all roads were blocked. According to Balgan, this was a sign of affliction with curses. In addition, Balgan explained to Yuri that the diagnosis of cancer was incorrect and that his health problem resulted from the doora which had afflicted his liver after each curse-attack. The situation required Yuri to be cleansed from the curses. To this end, Balgan asked him to fetch milk and artysh from the market.

Balgan instantly lit the candle and held it by Yuri's eyesight for a few seconds. Next, he cleansed Yuri with the candle holding it close to different areas of his body and moving downwards from his face to his feet. In the process, he was encircling Yuri with the candle (in a fashion similar to cleansing with artysh) and pronouncing in Russian: "Good (energy) is coming, the curse is leaving". Balgan propped the lit candle against the metal pot in which he kept his artysh. Yuri was asked to sit on the bench. I sat next to him. Balgan tied a blue thread to Yuri's right wrist; during this, he rather awkwardly invoked Khaiyrakan[3] in Russian to cleanse Yuri. Obviously, Balgan was not prepared to perform his invocation in Russian so that Yuri could understand it[4]. I relay below the verses he managed to pronounce (the full text of the invocation is presented in Tuvan in section 5.2):

[3] This term refers to the supreme deity of Tuvan cosmology.

[4] Unquestionably, the need to perform his invocation in Russian impinged on Balgan's performance. The lapses and the tiring repetition of the verses gave me the impression of an insecure and reluctant shaman. Clearly, this was not the Balgan I knew from all previous rituals.

Urshe[5] Khaiyrakan,

Pust' zlo ukhodit' ot etovo cheloveka,
Make the evil leave this person,

Pust' schast'e prikhodit' k etomu cheloveku
Make good come to this person,

Pust' bolezn' ykhodit'
Make the disease leave,

Pust' zashchita budet sil'noi
Make this protection strong[6]

"I tied a blue thread to your wrist so that *arzhaan*, water from springs, will cleanse you; after this, you will give up drinking", Balgan told Yuri. A red thread (a standard symbol of happiness) was tied to Yuri's right wrist and was intermingled with the blue one, "so that together they will make a powerful protection; what you have in your wrist is a kamgalal; it will protect you from those people who curse you", Balgan went on.

Next, Balgan held the candle close to the area of his liver and asked Yuri if he was feeling a pain there, to receive a rather vague and forced reply: "I have had a pain there for a long time". Yuri was looking nervous. I asked him what his health problem was. His response in a single word "*voobshche*" ("overall") gave me the impression that he did not want to speak about that. Balgan asked Yuri to take off his shirt and placed the palm of his hand on the area of the liver to remove the doora from within it. He abruptly pulled his hand from Yuri's body with his palm closed – an act signifying that the doora had been captured – and shook it by the stove to throw the doora away; having done this, he spat on the expelled entity. He then laid his hand on the area of Yuri's liver, saying that he was fighting the disease with bio-energy; this lasted a couple of seconds. Balgan knelt in front of Yuri and attempted to accumulate the doora from his body, moving his arms upwards with a great effort[7]. Starting from Yuri's feet, his arduous movements were stopped at Yuri's waist[8]. Balgan made a second attempt, successful this time. All the doora had now been accumulated in Yuri's head. A moment of suspense, and Balgan's

[5] This term can be translated as "merciful" ("miloserdnyi", in Russian).
[6] The transcription is based on notes, which I was making during the consultation. I did not use a recorder, because I felt that the client was not cooperative and he would not give his consent.
[7] I had never before seen Balgan accumulating doora from a client in this way, though Oyumaa, whom we will meet again in the third case study, commonly practised it with a characteristic dexterity.
[8] Balgan later told me that the power of the curses, which surrounded Yuri, was pressing his hands down.

growl, a sign that the doora had been captured in his palms. He rushed into the yard growling with his palms locked, to throw it away. His face straight, Yuri was sitting on the bench. Having returned, Balgan massaged Yuri's head to restore the proper function of his nervous system and release him from addiction to alcohol.

Balgan cleansed Yuri anew, this time with artysh. After this, he turned to the repertoire of Christian Orthodox ritual and blessed Yuri, anointing him in hands and forehead with water from a bowl (in a fashion reminiscent of the ritual of "Holy Water") and pronouncing: "Let good come and evil go, Amen". Ritual action was concluded with the familiar (for me) kamlaniye. Balgan said that the purpose of kamlaniye was to elicit from the spirits more information about Yuri's misfortunes and to return the curses to his enemies. However, there was nothing in this kamlaniye to remind me of Balgan's vivid performances[9]. The beat of the drum was desperately slow and his voice repeatedly faded away. Balgan's behaviour gave me the impression that he had to cope with the possibility of a performative disaster caused by Yuri's incredulity; that Yuri was incredulous was obvious from his responses and his estranged attitude during the consultation. Suddenly, Balgan turned his back to Yuri while performing, something that gave me the impression that he wanted to protect himself from Yuri's disbelief. A moment of silence, and Balgan resumed the disappointing performance. The kamlaniye went on for a few minutes. It was the shortest of all kamlaniye he had performed in my presence (it lasted less than ten minutes).

Covered by sweat and taking deep breaths, Balgan sat on his chair. Looking at me, he indicated with a flick of his wrist that the curses had been returned. His dialogue with Yuri follows:

Balgan: What is your relation with your ex-wife?

Yuri: We do not see each other any more.

Balgan: You get *some* curses from her as well [emphasis mine; see section 3.4]. You know yourself what the problem is. You drink with these two people [his business-partners] and everything goes wrong. But there is still an escape. We will verify everything now.

[9] I present such a performance in the third case study (section 5.2).

To do so, Balgan divined with stones anew, and the dire pattern of the first divination reappeared. Balgan repeated that Yuri had been cursed. Their dialogue follows:

Balgan: These two people want to deceive you. You should not be drinking with them, because they keep you under control this way.

Balgan took out the photo, which Yuri gave to him in the first part of the consultation. It showed Yuri with several other men.

Balgan [pointing to one of the men]: Is that the person to whom you gave money?

Yuri: Yes.

Balgan: I returned the curses to him. Even from this evening he will start feeling bad. You should not worry any longer, because the curses have been returned to your enemies. Soon things will change for the worse for them and for the better for you. As regards your health problem, you fell sick from weakness (*slabost'*, in Russian) of the nervous system because these people cursed you. We can work this out. I have to treat you two times more.

Yuri: But the doctors diagnosed cancer.

Balgan: This is incorrect. Your problem was caused by curses. Listen, when you meet with these people, you may drink up to two glasses. Not more than two! Then you have to stop, even if they offer you more.

Watching Balgan, I felt that his admonishing Yuri to refrain from drinking hid his realisation that Yuri was doubtful about his explanations. In what I perceived as a desperate attempt to avert a fit of anger with him as a target, Balgan repeated his admonition. Yuri was standing close to Balgan and staring at him. I feared that a violent conflict would erupt, with Yuri calling Balgan an impostor and attacking him. This did not happen, as Balgan ended the consultation and Yuri moved to the cash desk[10]. While he was leaving, I approached him in order to arrange a meeting with him, and I received his last response: "It is not worth it".

A couple of minutes later, Balgan commented:

"You saw him? He doesn't believe in me! As soon as I saw the candle, I realised that he did not believe in me, but in the candle. In this case, only shamanic psychology can work.

[10] The cashier charged him 400 rubles (approximately $12) for cleansing and curing.

I treated him both with the Christian and the shamanic method. First, I used the candle to hypnotise him and then I cured him as a shaman. The candle he brought creates süzük.

Balgan found it difficult to express the meaning of süzük in Russian. Initially, he translated it as *vera* (faith). The shaman Maadyr, who joined us a bit later, explained it as *nadiezhda* (hope) and *vnusheniye* (suggestion). Balgan added: "This means that this man (Yuri) relied on the candle. He fell sick with sagysh".

I asked him what sagysh means.

"It means that he was thinking bad thoughts about himself. He was thinking all the time that he would lose his money and fall sick. This came true. I gave him süzük to make him think well about himself. Sagysh goes away, süzük comes in".

Maadyr added: "If somebody thinks all the time that he will fall sick and die, this will happen. If he complains all the time that he is sick, the disease stays with him and he dies. But if somebody is in a good mood, no disease can make him sick".

Balgan continued: "Such people must be treated with süzük. There is a Tuvan proverb about this: "*Sagysh-bile aaryyr, süzük-bile emneer*"[11]. This cure offers relief. I cleansed this man with the candle, because he believes in Jesus. If he believes in Jesus, let him believe in Jesus, let him look at the candle, I treat him as a shaman. You saw, even with the candle I diagnosed the disease and treated him. This is süzük".

Part I

3.3. Strategies of redressing misfortune: shamanic Association versus bureaucracy

The case of Yuri contributes to a remarkable phenomenon, which emerges from Table 1: in 4 out of the 10 cases concerned with curse affliction the client's ethnicity is other than Tuvan. In addition to Yuri, there are two Russians (cases 12 and 15). To these I should add several other cases of Russians, who consulted shamans: 1) once, Balgan mentioned that he had treated a couple of Russians from curse affliction; 2) a taxi-driver told me that he had his car purified by a shaman, when I told him about my research; 3) a very stressed, middle-aged woman once consulted a shaman of the Association for an issue related to her son (I was not able to elicit any information)[12]. Even though consultations with Russians were rather scarce, I conjecture that Balgan and the other shamans of his Association removed curses from many more Russian clients than those I observed. If the picture of the clients in Table 1 reflects the ethnic composition of the

[11] It means: "Illness caused by sagysh is treated with süzük".
[12] Some time later I happened to see this woman on the newscast of the "Tuva Channel". According to the subtitle, she occupied an important position in the educational structures of the Republic.

clientele in all the shamanic Associations of Kyzyl, we can suggest that a relatively small, yet steady, flow of Russians resort to shamans in order to have curses removed.

Why then do Russians like Yuri employ a "shamanistic" pattern of mentality, curse affliction and retaliation by supernatural means, in their attempt to cope with misfortune? The answer might partially be that exposure to the "shamanistic" culture of Tuva has led Russians to internalise the indigenous beliefs of illness and misfortune; this makes sense, considering that Russians have been open to Tuvan influences for three centuries[13]. But I would like to suggest a more general explanation: belief in curses and evil magic has always been a part of the rural religion of Russians, something that reveals a striking similarity between Russian folk Christianity and what we acknowledge as "Siberian shamanism". Like the "shamanistic" natives of Siberia, Russian peasants ascribed illness and famine to evil magic (as well as to evil spirits) and resorted to sorcerers (*kolduny*), in order to have curses removed from themselves or an evil spirit expelled from their hut. Both in Tuvan "shamanism" and in folk Christianity, the belief exists that only a shaman or a sorcerer can undo a curse, which another one of his kind has wrought (Lewin 1985: 68). Just as in Siberian shamanstvo (shamanism), election to Russian koldovstvo (sorcery) occurred either hereditarily, through the inheritance of a mystical force from an ancestral spirit, or through direct acquisition from a supernatural source, or even after a command presented to the chosen one by this source; and, just as in Tuvan "shamanism", if the chosen one to become a *koldun* (sorcerer) ignores this command, she is punished with madness and death. According to the Russian tradition, the person aspiring to the craft of the sorcerer must enter a pact with the Devil, from whom he will draw the demonic powers of sorcery; in turn, the Devil will draw the life-force of the sorcerer, who dies in protracted agony (Ivanits 1989: 95-96). In a manner reminiscent of the koldun, Balgan is bound to a relation of dependence from the spirit of his shaman-grandmother: as we shall see (section 6.1), he draws his bio-energy from the spirit of his shaman-grandmother, who compels him to canalise it through curing clients; yet if he abstains from curing, he is led to experience fits. Despite this, we should note a difference between Balgan and the figure of the sorcerer: whereas the latter may use his esoteric power for harmful purposes, Balgan uses his bio-energy for curing clients.

Thus, the Russian sorcerer and the Siberian "shaman" mirror each other as far as initiation and relation to a supernatural source are concerned; both kinds of practitioner

[13] Russians began to settle in Tuva during the 18th century.

are forced into their role by spirits or occult forces and enter a binding relationship with them. This suggests that Siberian shamanism and Russian folk Christianity are reflections of each other, or different expressions of what is probably an archaic, pagan form of religiosity across Eurasia (see Fedotov 1946). I present a testimony regarding the practice of koldovstvo in Tuva: Balgan recalled that nearby the village where he grew up, there was a village inhabited by Russians, who had their own kolduny and appealed to them after a misfortune. The possibility of belief in curse-inflicted misfortune is embedded in both the Russian and Tuvan cultures. The same can be supported for case 8 in Table 1, the canteen-proprietor from an Islamic State of Central Asia. To relay his words about the employee from the same State, whom he suspected of evil magic: "She deals with magiya; we also have spells (zaklinaniya, in Russian) and kolduny like shamans in my country". Balgan told me that he had treated a few Central Asians (who live in Kyzyl) for curses. The above examples show that certain individuals within a multicultural urban society share the belief that their misfortunes result from curse affliction and resort to a shaman in order to redress a misfortune.

Now, I want to situate the problem of resorting to a shamanic Association within a broader context. The reader will notice that in Table 1 there are three cases (9, 14, 15), where the client is involved in tense relationships: in the first, the dispute has to do with the use of pasture which falls between two herding camps; in the second, with Yuri's contention that his business partners have embezzled his money; in the third, with the ownership of property, for which the client has additionally sought justice in the court. I leave aside the last case, as it involves parallel recourse to two different means of conflict resolution, and focus on cases 9 and 14. These are problems, for which the clients could have equally appealed to another mechanism of conflict resolution, such as the law-court or the police. As regards the latter, its selection is precluded because Tuvan policemen are generally viewed as unreliable and violent; it is rather unlikely that they would give these people a sympathetic ear, not to say that the latter ones would be asked to give a bribe or they would even end up beaten. Thus, there remains the option of the court.

In my view, these clients' preference of the shamanic Association to the court can be understood as a strategy of avoiding the time-consuming bureaucratic complications and the risk involved in appealing to the latter recourse. If this is so (and at this point I can only conjecture that this is so, since I cannot demonstrate this ethnographically), shamanic recourse is for these clients more effective in redressing their problem or achieving a desirable outcome than the court. Shamanic action is believed to return more

or less immediate results: after performing kamlaniye to return the curses to one of Yuri's business partners, Balgan assured Yuri that this man would start to feel bad even from the very same evening (section 3.2). Likewise, in case 8 the time gap between shamanic action and favourable results is quite short: only a few days after the counter-cursing ritual, the proprietor's situation improves, while the enemy falls sick (p. 64). Here, it is obvious that the cultural belief in the efficacy of shamanic ritual to redress a problem is ingrained in this client's mind; we can surmise that even before resorting to Balgan, this client expected that the ritual would effectuate the desirable outcome or that he fantasised the dire consequences which would befall his enemy[14].

In her work on shamanism and divination in Mongolia, Swancutt suggests that the above mechanisms of conflict resolution, namely court and shamanic action, represent two different "ontologies of time"; she describes the former as a bureaucratic "ontology of delay", while the second as a more effective "ontology of direct returns". According to this, in moments of crisis people may eschew bureaucratic means of conflict resolution, which offer anything but a quick return, and go in for an alternate "ontology of direct returns", which grants an expedient – fast and effective – resolution of their problems (personal communication). Drawing on a case of persistent curse affliction, Swancutt argues that the cursed members of a household came up with an innovative method of countering curse afflictions: placing menstrual or post-parturition blood at the household threshold, an effective "ontology of direct returns", since it blocked the curses altogether, in contrast to the prescribed method of fumigation[15], which in this context resembles the court as an "ontology of delay", since it only palliates the problem after it has set in (see 2002: 174 ff., also, 2006).

Case 15 (p. 65) presents a comparable example, where the client works through two different means of redressing a problem simultaneously, the first being the court (ontology of delay), the second being shamanic action (ontology of direct returns). Here, the client's strategy is possibly to keep both ontologies running in parallel, until one of them manages to effectuate the desirable outcome, punishment of the evildoer. However, there is a difference between shamanic action and court as to the nature of punishment in

[14] One may rightly argue that the proprietor's case has no objective basis, which would justify recourse to the court, e.g., a dispute over property. Clearly, in this case bringing to the court an accusation of affliction with curses would be meaningless (I take this issue below). Yet this does not undermine my position that for this case no other means of redressing the proprietor's problem would bring about the desired outcome as expeditiously as shamanic action, considering that a desired outcome is here defined as improving the business and punishing the evil doer.

[15] This is equivalent to the practice of aryglaar (section 2.4).

each case: in the former, the result of punitive action (either through kamlaniye or through staring at a photo of the victim) is sickness and ideally death; in the latter, punishment is circumscribed by a legal context imposing a certain penalty on the person found guilty – in case 15, the ex-husband would be forced to return to the accuser her legitimate share or he would probably end up in prison. My point is that both these means of redressing a problem display limitations regarding the feasibility of punishment – if by "punishment" in case 15 the client means driving the enemy sick by means of returning the curses to him and legally accessing her share (and even achieving a penalty against him, e.g., imprisonment, for withholding the share from her). In the case of shamanic retaliation, we cannot expect anything else but having the enemy driven sick or (ideally) dead; Balgan cannot be of any use with respect to this client's claims over her share (if we exempt his ability for influencing the decision of the court in favour of the client through kamlaniye). Likewise, the court may justify the client's appeal for accessing her share and imprison her enemy, but it cannot induce in him a physical suffering equivalent to (or even greater than) the accuser's illness, as shamanic retaliation does – according to the cultural belief. What we can infer from this client's strategy towards punishing her enemy is an intention to retaliate the curse affliction (and its consequence, illness) on equal terms and to pursue compensation from the enemy by legal action; the combination of shamanic and judicial processes offsets the constraints of each of these recourses.

On the other hand, we have two cases (9 and 14), where the clients prefer the shamanic Association to the court in order to redress their problems – pasture use and embezzlement respectively. I suspect that, by selecting shamanic recourse, they did not only intend to avoid a delay in issuing a verdict, which one should expect when appealing to a bureaucratic mechanism; certainly, any delay would be disastrous for them, since it would prolong their exposure to cursing. They also intended to avoid the risk of facing an unfavourable (for them) verdict, which the court could issue after judging each of the litigants' claims on its merits; contrary to the court, there exists no opportunity for the other side to state their case in a shamanic consultation. Indeed, in all cases Balgan issues a verdict which validates the clients' suspicion/accusation of being cursed, the divination of curse affliction (see next section).

So far, I have distinguished two factors compelling one to resort to the shamanic Association, which encompass ethnic Tuvans, Russians, and other nationalities living in Tuva. The first is a cultural belief in cursing. The second is a sociological one: if punishing the evildoer is what these clients seek, appealing to a shaman is sometimes

preferable to a bureaucratic means of conflict resolution (court), since the former may grant the desirable outcome much more expediently than the latter and without entailing the risk of an unfavourable (for the client) outcome; thus, the shamanic Association parallels the court, but with the crucial difference that the prosecutor's claim for punitive sanction against the evildoer is always approved. To these I want to add one more factor, of a socio-psychological nature: suspicion/accusation of curse affliction rests on a subjective experience or state of mind, which is a non-empirical condition; as such, it cannot be recognised as evidence by the law, let alone as a crime (cf. Schapera 1969). For instance, I might feel certain that my misfortunes are due to curses by envious friends and relatives in Greece (or due to sorcery practised by them), yet such an accusation lacks an empirical substantiation, which the court would require as evidence of crime. Thus, we conclude that a confluence of cultural, sociological and psychological factors may lead individuals of different nationalities in Kyzyl to attempt to redress a problem by resorting to a shaman instead of a bureaucratic mechanism.

3.4. Divination validates suspicions of curse affliction

Compared to Victor Turner's famous "Revelation and Divination in Ndembu Ritual", Balgan's account of the divination he performed for Yuri seems somewhat dull and uninteresting at first glance. This is so, because Ndembu "divination is specially concerned with *uncovering the hidden causes* of ills brought about by the immoral or self-serving thoughts, words and deeds of incumbents of positions in an institutionally structured social system" (Turner 1975: 15; emphasis mine). The diviner exposes the occult forces of witchcraft, which bring about illness and misfortune. As Turner puts it, bringing into the open what is hidden or unknown is central to all Ndembu ritual (ibid. 1975: 211-12; also, Devisch 1985: 66).

By contrast, the divination for Yuri does not disclose anything he does not know already or suspect (apart from that his ex-wife curses him; see below), but confirms his suspicion that his partners curse him. This leads me to define this divination not as a disclosure of unknown information, but as a validation of Yuri's suspicion of being cursed. I argue that Balgan intentionally unfolds the divination along a cognitive process, which is permeated by a "deterministic order[16]": the establishment of curse affliction as

[16] I adopt this expression from Devisch (1985: 63).

the cause of misfortune. For analytical purposes, I divide the divinatory process into four stages: elicitation, validation, further elicitation and fine-tuning, and verification.

First, elicitation: before reading the stones, Balgan elicits crucial information about Yuri's relationships with important persons in his life. The latter's reference to his dissolved marriage[17] and his suspicion of his partners as cursing him allow Balgan to identify points of tension and suspense in Yuri's relationships, which he will involve in the following stages. It is not unreasonable to assume that as Yuri is reviewing the history of his relationships during his narrative, he touches on the dark side of his relationship with his partners, by revealing his suspicions of being cursed. If this is right, it emerges that the purpose of this elicitation is to make Yuri psychologically aware of the hidden dimension of his friendship with his partners and thus to create a consensus between him and Balgan, which is crucial for the successful resolution of the divination. In a way reminiscent of the psychoanalytic consultation, where the analyst listens to the client speaking, Balgan elicits from Yuri a narrative, which must have a self-persuasive effect, since it draws him to verbalise a subjective state of mind, suspicion of curse affliction.

This leads us to conclude that elicitation is not only what it seems to be, a way of collecting important information from the client. It is an art of self-persuasion, which Balgan causes Yuri to perform, so that together they establish an intersubjective consensus through divination of curse affliction (cf. Vitebsky 1993: 99-120; 245-46). In the next case study (section 4.2), we will see a reverse interaction, in which Balgan vicariously performs a narrative based on a part of his own biography in order to induce a transformative experience in the client.

Second, validation: this is achieved by means of stone-divination (khuvaanak). I consider this as a practice looking forward to a deterministic outcome, since in all the consultations I observed it confirmed the client's suspicion or conviction of being cursed[18]. But arguing simply that validation of Yuri's (and of any client's) suspicion is

[17] Of course, we did not see Yuri saying this, since I was not present at the first part of the consultation. However, Balgan's question of what his relation is to his ex-wife (section 3.2) makes it clear that Yuri had told Balgan about that before the divination.

[18] Yet the deterministic orientation of khuvaanak can be jeopardised by potential random arrangements of the stones. For instance, would Balgan have confirmed Yuri's suspicion if a single stone had appeared in the upper part of each road instead of three? (This is a standard divinatory symbolism of auspicious future). I suspect he would, adding nevertheless that the stones presage better days. Though I have not mastered the complicated technique of "three road" divination or attempted a probabilistic analysis, I suspect that, as an experienced practitioner Balgan can arrange the stones in a pre-conceived pattern without this affecting the "random" look of the divinatory process. However it may be, I am not concerned with the technical side of khuvaanak, but with its effects on the client's social relations and with the way shaman and client reach a divinatory conclusion.

the purpose of khuvaanak would entail nothing else but a tautology. Balgan's divination achieves a forceful validity, because as an explanation of Yuri's misfortunes in terms of curse affliction it develops the idea of treacherousness and covetousness lurking in his partners' companionship, or what Turner, referring to Ndembu witches and sorcerers, calls the "duplicity of bad people" (1975: 239). Now it emerges that, contrary to my deprecating characterisation of Balgan's divination as dull and uninteresting, his khuvaanak discloses the terrible reality underlying the illusion of togetherness. Of course, even before the consultation, Yuri was preoccupied with the idea of being cursed. By elaborating his suspicion, the divinatory process reaffirms the connection Yuri had made between his partners' curses and his bankruptcy.

Third, further elicitation and fine-tuning: to evaluate his divinatory vision during kamlaniye, that the ex-wife is cursing Yuri, Balgan elicits from him information regarding his relation to his ex-wife (section 3.2). I suggest that this elicitation is part of Balgan's strategy of unfolding the divinatory process according to a deterministic order (curse affliction), since it permits him to adjust the importance of his pronouncement (the ex-wife's curses) to the intensity of Yuri's response. It is obvious that in the first elicitation Balgan identified Yuri's divorce as a potential source of conflict. That he did so can be shown by the fact that in this elicitation he involves Yuri's ex-wife as an agent of affliction. Nevertheless, he avoids proclaiming his ex-wife's curses as an important agent in Yuri's misfortunes. Obviously, this is because of Yuri's response that he does not see his wife often; this response does not encourage Balgan to use Yuri's ex-wife as a complementary cause of Yuri's misfortunes. I suspect that Balgan might have done so, if Yuri had mentioned that he continued relating to his ex-wife and that he suspected her of cursing him; establishing an additional curse-attack would reinforce the divinatory outcome of complete blockage. Instead, he brings his divinatory pronouncement on a par with Yuri's "neutral" response, saying that he receives *some* curses from her. Suspicions of curse affliction can only develop within contexts of relatedness involving familiarity, closeness or even intimacy.

I suggest that it is this tuning of the scale of the divinatory pronouncement to the intensity of the client's response that facilitates the formation of an intersubjective consensus between shaman and client and accounts for the persuasiveness of divination. If Balgan had over-interpreted Yuri's response, engaging in a dramatic performance of divining curse affliction, he would have risked his credibility. Considering Yuri's "neutral" response, a divination that his wife afflicts him with *some* curses is more

believable than a divination that her curses are catalytic in causing Yuri's misfortunes. Indeed, Yuri does not question this pronouncement, neither he expresses any interest in it. Finally, Balgan abandons it, since Yuri's response does not encourage its elaboration, and the divinatory process refocuses on the main agents of Yuri's misfortunes, his partners.

Lars Hojer puts forward a similar argument regarding the efficacy of divination in northern Mongolia. He conceptualises the production of divinatory knowledge not as a one-way flow of unambiguous information from the diviner to the client, but as the result of an explorative dialogue between them. In his own words: "divination is a site where the client and the diviner draw on the input of each other to *elicit something that neither of them could have said on their own*" (2004: 150; emphasis in the original). Hojer argues that the diviner's questions to the client have a "suggestive value": the diviner suggests an answer to the client's question by means of asking a question[19]. For instance: "Did you drink water from a spring?" as a response to the client's question of why she has disconcerting dreams (2004: 146). In this way, the diviner intends to make the client imbued with the suggestive force which his question conveys. In a similar fashion, Balgan establishes the divination of curse affliction by Yuri's partners on the input he elicits from him. And after kamlaniye, he attempts to introduce a complementary line of curse affliction by the ex-wife, which reinforces his divination that Yuri's ways are all blocked, on the basis of Yuri's response to the question of how he relates to his ex-wife. I think that, by asking this question, he intends to explore whether Yuri would support an identification of his ex-wife as an additional agent of curse affliction; accordingly, based on Yuri's response, he attempts to instil in him one more point of tension for the purposes of divination. Thus, his divination initially confirms Yuri's suspicion of being cursed and attempts to open a new field of tension by a "leading" or "suggestive" question, which is intended to incite Yuri's suspicion.

Fourth, verification: the divinatory process ends with a second khuvaanak, where the outcome of the first one is repeated (three stones on the upper part of all three roads, a sign that Yuri's ways are blocked by the curses). I would like to dwell on the paradox, which emerges from performing a divination to verify an already established premise; moreover, a premise, which was furnished by Yuri himself (in the form of a suspicion) and, as such, it provides the ground for consensus between shaman and client. If the divinatory process develops along a deterministic order, why does Balgan take the risk of

invalidating the outcome of the first khuvaanak (the divination of curse affliction) by performing a second one? Any different arrangement of the stones could jeopardise his strategy of legitimizing the divination of curse affliction and consequently effect a blow to his credibility.

No doubt that risk-taking is intrinsic to all performative contexts in which Balgan operates (cf. Howe 2000; also, Atkinson 1989). This is all the more true when he has to exercise his shamanic skills on a distrustful client like Yuri. Yet it is difficult to imagine that the experienced and astute Balgan will accept losing face before the client due to an inability to interpret an arrangement of the stones different to that of the first khuvaanak. Although I cannot demonstrate this ethnographically, I suppose that in a case of dissimilarity between the first and the second khuvaanak Balgan might invoke a standard divinatory symbolism to minimise risk and furthermore to claim prestige on his ritual efficacy (cf. Riches 1994: 391). For instance, in case a single stone appeared in the upper part of all three roads, Balgan might explain this as a sign that *all* doora was removed in a single session, an explanation that gives him the opportunity to claim prestige on the efficacy of his kamlaniye[20]. If so, one might observe that it would be in Balgan's interest to pursue a divinatory outcome showing improvement rather than one showing that, even though ritual action was taken, nothing has yet changed. Actually, to a client expecting to learn from the second khuvaanak whether the curses have been removed, a divinatory outcome repeating the first one, would suggest that Balgan's kamlaniye has failed. Yet I think that Balgan would prefer this divinatory outcome for two reasons. First, it entails a financial profit, because in this case the client must go through two more sessions so that the doora will be completely removed. Second, he has the opportunity to expound on the client's misfortune by means of secondary elaborations built on his divination, securing thus a long-term client or drawing him/her to a relation of dependency.

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[19] Hoyer describes divination as "elicitation" in his doctoral thesis (2004: 146), where from I draw this term.

[20] For this speculation to be valid, the following conditions must stand in effect. First, Balgan does not arrange the stones in a preconceived pattern through some kind of sleight-of-hand (if he did so, there would be no risk involved in the second khuvaanak and consequently no need to invoke a standard divinatory symbolism in order to maintain his credibility). Second, the client knows that each arrangement of the stones corresponds to a different meaning (in case he notices a possible difference between the first and the second khuvaanak). I cannot tell whether Yuri knew anything about khuvaanak. But it seems to me that in the scenario of the one stone in all three roads Balgan would claim prestige on his performative efficacy, no matter whether Yuri had noticed the difference in the second khuvaanak.

3.5. Shaman and client: misfortune, analogy, and symbolic transformation

Considering Balgan's biography, the divination for Yuri evolves around two themes, which Balgan himself has also experienced: first, his friends deceived him (section 1.6), second, his first marriage was dissolved (section 1.8). Thus, it emerges that shaman and client have been through similar misfortunes. In this section, I will probe into the distinction between the persons of the shaman and the layman in the post-Soviet age, using the parallel between Balgan and Yuri as a ground for discussion.

A deeper look at Balgan's biography reveals that his becoming a shaman involves two different kinds of transformative experience. The first, his ex-wife's death and his crisis ensuing, is an ordinary misfortune, which a non-shaman could also go through; the same is true for his friends' deceit, a kind of misfortune that a client of his, Yuri, has also experienced. The second, his election by his shaman-grandmother (section 1.8), is a mystical or an extraordinary experience, to which access is restricted to a closed elite of persons, those with a shamanic descent. These three events all had transformative implications for Balgan: his friends' deceit leads him to realise his faculty for retribution, which is intrinsic in his first name; his ex-wife's death leads him to a long crisis, from which he emerges as an enhanced person, a shaman helping people to cope with their own crises; while, his grandmother's touch was the formal mark of his consecration to shamanism, an insignia that every self-respecting hereditary shaman like Balgan must be endowed with.

It becomes apparent that the above pattern of shamanic transformation radically departs from the classical Eliadean pattern of becoming a shaman in Siberia (a pattern which Eliade formulated on the basis of the Soviet ethnography and which has prevailed in the universal ethnography of shamanism ever since). In Eliade's famous "*Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy*" (1964) shamanic initiation (involving apprenticeship next to an elder shaman) is the conclusion of a unitary set of personal experiences (such as terrifying visions, madness and/or election by an ancestral spirit), which occur at a certain stage of the novice's lifetime (usually during adolescence). Now, Balgan's totality of his experiences related to his transformation into a shaman contrasts with the prevalent paradigm, since it consists of *successive* events leading to the attainment of an enhanced state each time: in 1988 his grandmother's appearance marks his assumption of the shaman's role; a few years later, the grave punishment his friends receive leads him to realise that his first name contains a power of retribution; in 1999 he resurrects his shamanic practice, after having cast it away to mourn the death of his wife (in the final

part of this section I shall suggest that Balgan has not simply resurrected the shamanism he had left behind, but has effected a symbolic self-transformation from an ill person to a healing shaman). One may argue that Balgan had already been practising as a shaman before giving it up due to his ex-wife's death. True, yet this tripartite succession of his development as a shaman compels me to conceptualise shamanic transformation not as a unitary manifestation of a faculty, which its possessor can always activate during his lifetime, but as an impulse, or more precisely, a potential for symbolic transformation, which Balgan may continually shed and reassume in the unfinished character of the times. His formal election by his grandmother is but one from a number of events, which marked his transformation into a shaman. Moreover, this election amounts to his formal initiation as a shaman (a feature congruent with the classical Siberian pattern of initiatory visions in shaman-novices), which is succeeded by two events (money loss and the death of his ex-wife) as ordeals on the path of his shamanic development; his overcoming these ordeals enables him to progress to higher levels of self-realisation and develop his ritual repertoire, as healing and retaliation become now the emblems of his shamanic practice. Reversing his biography toward the past, I have presented so far three events which had transformative consequences for Balgan; in the following two case studies I shall present two more.

Balgan's example indicates that becoming a shaman is more a process than an instant, life-changing experience. At its core there exists a mystical element, a hereditary faculty for investing misfortune with a symbolic meaning; yet this faculty can be continually shed away and resurrected, as a crucial event of his psychobiography, his crisis after the death of his first wife and his resumption of the shamanic role, shows. Moreover, his example presents one more point of departure from the classical pattern of initiation in Siberian – and by extension in Tuvan – shamanism: whereas the shamans of the pre-Soviet age were recruited after election by an ancestral spirit or attack by a terrible spiritual force (albys), Balgan's shamanic faculties (revenge – healing) are revealed after undergoing misfortunes which non-shamans may also undergo, such as monetary fraud and marriage break-up. The hereditary faculty – I call it a potential for a symbolisation which is far greater than in laypeople like Yuri – is still a vital constituent of the shaman's person, as it was in the pre-Soviet age; but the difference is that nowadays it is misfortunes accruing from ordinary life under post-socialism that provide the impetus for the manifestation of this faculty. In pre-Soviet Tuva albys-shamans could cure their clients from spirit-induced madness, because they themselves had successfully

undergone such an affliction (Kenin-Lopsan 1987: 17) and because, I suggest, they could empathise with their clients' drama. In post-Soviet Tuva Balgan undertakes to relieve his client from misfortunes as financial disaster and marriage break-up, because he himself has been through such misfortunes and resolved them symbolically, by drawing transformative meanings out of them. In other words, Balgan partakes of the same experiences with Yuri, except that misfortune was for him the onset of a symbolic self-transformation.

In my view, these three features of Balgan's biography, his election by the spirit of his grandmother along with his friends' deceit and his ex-wife's death, indicate that shamanic transformation in post-Soviet Tuva has expanded beyond mystical experiences of spirit-election to encompass misfortunes and traumatic events, which laypeople may experience. Balgan's case reveals that the repertoire of shamanic transformation may now involve both esoteric experiences and misfortunes occurring in the context of everyday life in the post-socialist age. One could argue that Balgan's example does not constitute an innovation, since in the pre-Soviet times also ordinary misfortunes could provide the onset for assumption of the shaman's role, as the ethnography of traditional northern Siberian and Arctic societies shows: laypeople becoming shamans after life-threatening accidents during hunting or helpless orphans coping with privation who amassed a large herd after turning to shamanism (see Czaplicka 1914: 174-175)[21]. In fact, Balgan's life-story could be seen as a modern version of the story of the orphan-turned-into a shaman. (This analogy emerges from Balgan's narrative of the killing of his shaman-grandmother by the Soviets and of the privations he underwent, which culminates in his transformation into a shaman taking revenge on the Soviet system)[22].

Still, I would be reluctant to generalise on the basis of several examples coming from shamanic traditions other than the Tuvan, even more so, taking into account that the literature of Tuvan shamanism does not mention examples of shamanic initiation after ordinary misfortunes. In any case, even if we accept that this literature did not record but the most impressive or exceptional cases of shamanic initiation, those involving affliction or election by a supernatural force, there is an element in Balgan's biography, fraud and the revelation of his faculty for retaliation, which suggests that the repertoire of shamanic initiation in Tuva has expanded to encompass misfortunes occurring under conditions of

[21] See also Zorbas 2001, for a review of relevant examples from the Arctic ethnography.
[22] Balgan will perform this narrative for a client in the next case study (section 4.2). I have introduced his account of Soviet persecution and transition from affluence to poverty in section 1.8.

post-socialism. Balgan offers a case of shamanic transformation, which evolves from an aspect of social tension in contemporary Tuva, trust and its exploitation for materialistic ends.

Thus, Balgan's biography includes two different narratives (or kinds) of shamanic initiation: the first is the touch by his grandmother, the official narrative whereby he claims a shamanic descent; the second involves his friends' deceit and his ex-wife's death, events, which, as I argued, are similar to Yuri's misfortunes. In fact, it was a few days after the consultation with Yuri that Balgan told me about his friends' deceit, perhaps a sign that he had perceived an analogy between Yuri and himself: Yuri's misfortune echoes his old friends' deceit. Balgan's failed friendships and marriage must have had a sharp emotional impact on him, just as they would have to a non-shaman. But, contrary to a non-shaman, they activate a transformative process for Balgan: in the first case, he realises the potential for retribution, which is intrinsic in his first name, Kara-ool; in the second, he returns as an enhanced person, a shaman, after a personal crisis. I cannot tell whether Balgan has realised this, but these experiences had initiatory implications for him. We arrive then at a fascinating (for me) conclusion: it is also misfortunes situated in ordinary life that trigger the revelation of an existential condition, Balgan's hereditary impulse for shamanic practice, and some of these can be misfortunes distinctive of post-socialism.

Caroline Humphrey makes a similar suggestion regarding a shaman's narrative of election by the spirits in the post-Soviet city of Ulan-Ude (Buryatiya)[23]. The thrust of her premise is that the shaman's narrative of initiation, the vision of a tip-up lorry smashing a human body (which the spirits showed to the elected person in order to force her to become a shaman), draws on a disconcerting image of daily life in post-Soviet Ulan-Ude, the bus as "a microcosm of social ills" (1999: 4). According to this, the shaman's narrative catches hold of this image, which is loaded with a negative social meaning, and attaches it to a subjective preoccupation, the unseen forces, which shamans alone can perceive (1999: 4-5). Here, subjective experience of shamanic initiation is interwoven with social concerns about the difficulties of living in a post-Soviet city; the miserable microcosm of the bus with its angry driver and the passengers' grim faces becomes the point where ordinary and occult experiences of agony intersect. The classical (pre-Soviet) motif of shamanic initiation through the candidate's destruction and re-articulation by the

[23] The example refers to the shaman Nadya Stepanova (section 1.4).

unseen forces reappears in this shamanic narrative, though the initiation is actualised through a means of Soviet technology. To mention a similar example from Tuva: a shaman from Balgan's Association, working formerly as a smith (*targan*, in Tuvan) in a Soviet *zavod* (factory, in Russian), was elected after an occult experience he had while forging metals: the spirit of his shaman-ancestor emerged from the sparks flying around him, instructing him to become a shaman. Here, a cultural element as traditional as the connection between the shaman and the smith[24] is employed to a subversive effect. This shaman's narrative rests on a historically evocative image, the worker (*rabotnik*, in Russian) as a symbol of a bright communist future; and, at the same time, it undermines the dream of communism by means of a revelation of the occult within the Soviet zavod. Writing of the Ulan-Ude shaman's biography, Humphrey argues that shamanic power is revealed in "paradigmatic Sovietizing institutions", such as the school and the hospital, thereby vanquishing them (1999: 6). In the shaman-smith's narrative, his occult power is revealed in such an institution, debunking its authority.

What we could perhaps make of Balgan's biography in conjunction with Yuri's case is that new kinds of shaman – or new reasons for becoming a shaman – can appear in Tuva as a response to the post-socialist flux. Clearly, Balgan and Yuri suffered the same misfortune, severe money loss. This experience of mutual (ordinary) misfortune underlies the intersubjectivity between shaman and client, and, as we shall see in the next case study, it is the key to the resolution of the therapeutic process. Yet it is difficult to imagine Yuri (or any other client with a similar misfortune) following Balgan's path of transformation into a shaman. The difference between Balgan and Yuri is that the former is constituted from a hereditary force and has a potential for symbolic transformation of ordinary misfortunes, such as loss of money or of a beloved person, investing them with a meaning of personal enhancement. (As I shall suggest in the next section, the candle, which Balgan treated Yuri with, is a symbol of Balgan's transformation out of misfortune). Additionally, there are social factors precluding such a radical self-transformation for a client like Yuri; Tuvan society would not accept ordinary hardships as insignia for declaring oneself as a shaman without the additional elements of shamanic descent and spirit-election (or affliction).

[24] In many traditional Siberian cultures – and, I assume, in Tuva – the belief was held that the smith, due to his mastery in forging metals, had shamanistic powers which exceeded the shaman's power (Vitebsky 1995: 84).

The reader will recall that two more shamans, whom I introduced in section 1.8, Maadyr and Oyumaa, had an experience similar to Balgan's, marriage-failure. I cannot tell whether this event had as serious an impact on their lives as in Balgan's, therefore I can only speculate whether it compelled them to turn to shamanism. As regards Oyumaa, I would seriously consider the situation, which Obeyesekere describes for a priestess in Sri Lanka: marital conflict pushes her to seek solace in religion, by devoting herself to the gods and performing various rituals for them (1981: 127-31). It is likely that her failed marriages led Oyumaa, whose life had been marked by acute spirit-affliction by that time, to experience frustration, renounce domesticity and devote herself to shamanic practice and to meditation. That is, they may have had a revelatory meaning for her.

Yet Oyumaa is an exception to the rule: the dramatic experiences of affliction she reported are extremely rare among contemporary narratives of shamanic initiation. In the majority of the cases I recorded, the election involves a command on behalf of the spirits, followed by an illness, which retreats after acceptance of the role. Breathtaking accounts of supernatural horror and spirit-induced madness as a passage to shamanic initiation are probably diminishing and they tend to become a thing of pre-Soviet shamanic experience. Balgan's official narrative of initiation does not involve any occult horror[25], but a simple election by the spirit of his grandmother. Just like with devitalising kamlaniye of trance (section 1.7), the absence of madness or horror from narratives of shamanic initiation is perhaps intended to make shamanic practice more accessible to (and acceptable by) contemporary Tuvans, for whom shamanism and Buddhism are parts of the spiritual and religious complex of Tuva and overlap in beliefs and practices[26]. For instance, many of the Tuvans appealing to shamans in order to have a curse removed or a cleansing could also have appealed to lamas (Buddhist priests), since the latter ones also practice curse-removals and cleansing. Thus, to compete with lamas (as well as with various counsellors and family-therapists available in Kyzyl), shamans like Balgan must employ a therapeutic discourse which matches their clients' anxieties. Or, to use Humphrey's comment about the contemporary shamans of Ulan-Ude, Balgan and his colleagues must be "creative, since they must weave together whatever images will produce belief and trust from bewildered, disheartened clients" (1999: 3-4). Balgan's healing narrative makes use of

[25] Nevertheless, we will see Balgan revealing childhood experiences of occult horror (section 5.3.4).

[26] A nice illustration of this overlap is Balgan's following comment: "Shamanism and Lamaism live together, just as my grandmother (Kara-kys) and my grandfather did" (the reader will recall that Balgan's grandfather was a lama; section 1.8). Nevertheless, it should be noted that Balgan was hostile to Buddhism and to its religious practitioners, whom he used to dismiss as ritually ineffective.

selected autobiographical sketches woven together; he will employ this narrative in the next case study (section 4.2).

Once, I happened to observe a somewhat unusual consultation in the Association, since the client was a doctor working at a State-hospital in Kyzyl. The client, a middle-aged Tuvan woman, was worried about her son's addiction to alcohol, something that, as she mentioned, had caused much trouble to her family. Despite the fact that the shaman, an intelligent young man, diagnosed curse affliction, the focus of the consultation was on the disturbed relationship between the client and her son. The shaman undertook to soothe the woman's worries by means of a discourse which was reminiscent of psychotherapy or counselling, since it provided advice on how both sides should be reconciled with each other. The only thing left to remind me that this consultation was "shamanic" was the short kamlaniye that this shaman performed to cleanse the client from curses. The effect of his discourse on the woman was so powerful that at the end of the consultation she exclaimed: "You (the shamans) treat the clients so nicely! We (the doctors) treat them for two minutes and turn them away." The shaman responded to this compliment with a warm "*sadis, pogovorim*" (have a seat, let's talk, in Russian)[27] and, when the client asked him what the price was, he replied "give whatever you want", an indirect way to tell the woman that for him she was not a source of income. Later, he expounded on his healing methodology: "We must *spokoino pogovorit'* (calmly talk) to the clients; this is what they come here for".

Now, read some verses from an account of initiatory death and rebirth, part of a shamanic epos of the peoples of Manchuria, which was regionally famous during the first decades of the 20th century. It is about the female shaman Nishan addressing a client, who had begged her to rescue his son's soul: "Since [you] have come to search, I'll tell [you] the communication of the great source", and "[my] whole body turned into powder. With a breaking of eighty bones ninety bones were twisted" (Humphrey 1996: 33). There is no doubt that in my example above the woman is not worrying that her son's soul is lost or stolen by a spirit, neither is she searching for any mysterious source of shamanic power. Equally, Nishan's narrative of fragmentation would be unintelligible to her and irrelevant to her problems. But not so with the client searching for his son's soul, for whom the

[27] The client was about to leave at that moment (the dialogue took place in Russian, since the client could not speak Tuvan). Incidentally, the word "pogovorim" appears on the front cover of a leaflet published bythe "Centre for the social-psychological support of young people" in the city of Yakutsk (Sakha Republic), directed by the psychotherapist Tuprina Oktyabrina Ksenofontovna. See their website: www.psicentr.ykt.ru

shaman's reliving her initiatory crisis in every healing ritual (Humphrey 1996: 31) must have been a culturally conditioned expression of ritual efficaciousness. If the doctor-woman had consulted a shaman like Nishan (assuming that there currently exist shamans in Tuva, who underwent Nishan's initiatory experiences), she would have taken her as a lunatic, something that explains Balgan's reluctance to trance in his kamlaniye (section 1.7). Arcane ritual language and trance would not offer any relief to disheartened clients like the doctor or to clients facing the uncertainty of survival; it probably would appal them, inducing in their minds an even more dismal vision of the world they live in.

All the above indicates that the nature of the intersubjectivity between shaman and client in contemporary Tuva is shifting from an idiom of spirit-affliction to one of misfortunes as repercussions of the post-socialist transition. The analogy between Balgan and his clients is more based on manifestations of contemporary social dysfunction than on the classical "spirit-affliction" cause of misfortune. Looking again at Table 1 (section 2.5), only three cases (4, 10, 11) conform to the pre-Soviet pattern of affliction by an ancestral spirit, on which an analogy between shaman and client was based (in the sense that the shaman could treat such an affliction, because he had managed to master the shamanic ancestral spirit afflicting him). Case 10 offers a characteristic example of this kind of relatedness: Balgan is treating a woman for affliction with fits caused by the spirit of her shaman-grandmother and offers to instruct her how to master this spirit; he does so on the basis of having himself managed to master the spirit of his shaman-grandmother (Kara-Kys) for curing his clients. On the other hand, there are seven cases (5, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16), which have to do with misfortunes representative of the social ills of post-Soviet Tuva, such as alcoholism, dissolution of relationships and financial or professional failure. These are the same misfortunes, which Balgan, a special individual, possessed of a hereditary mystical force, has suffered! Yet Balgan does not simply stand on a par with his clients due to mutual misfortunes; he differs from his clients in that his misfortunes were for him the onset of a symbolic transformation.

Let us see how this transformation occurs in his case. Unlike Yuri, the money loss Balgan suffered is not a stalemate for him, but the beginning of a process of personal enhancement, since it leads him to realise the ability for retribution, which is inherent in his first name, Kara-ool. Even though he does not explicitly utter this, his account seems to signify that his misfortune was a rite of passage towards this realisation (the idea of attaining a state of advanced self-realisation through a misfortune will reappear more conspicuously in the next case study). It is as if his ability for retribution, which I defined

as a form of consciousness unwilling to submit itself to the person (section 1.6), was lying dormant, waiting for the proper historical context, post-socialism, to appear. His reflection on this ability is expressive of a progression from loss to an impressive self-transformation. Loss has been transformed into a powerful symbolic idiom: retribution, which has now become a vital element of his symbol-system and the flagship of his ritual practice. By contrast, Yuri seems to be committed to failure and locked within despair; whatever reflexivity he is able to produce, it hovers around suspicion of curse affliction, precluding thus any potential for symbolic transformation – until the latter is worked out by the shaman as a therapeutic insight (see next case).

A similar pattern of transformation emerges from Balgan's other misfortune, the loss of his ex-wife. Here, the pattern of demonic affliction and symbolic transformation, which Obeyesekere has formulated in order to grasp and analyse the personal experiences of the ecstatic priestesses in Sri Lanka can provide useful insights into the transformation I discern in Balgan. According to Obeyesekere, the priestess is a transformed person (like Balgan): she has been through a "dark night of the soul", involving frightening visions, seizures and bodily illness, as a result of her betraying a loving parental figure. The latter dies in her absence. The future priestess experiences guilt; she is attacked by the spirit of her parental figure, who has now turned into a vengeful demon. This affliction pushes her to undertake ritual penances of self-mortification in order to expiate her guilt. Eventually, her induction into the role of the priestess entails a transformation of the afflicting agent: the persecuting demon becomes a benevolent spirit, helping the priestess in her religious and curing practices. Accordingly, it entails a transformation of her ecstatic experiences: the fits and frightening visions have given way to joyous, even orgasmic, experiences of communion with a male deity, the lord of the great pilgrimage site of Kataragama (1990: 11-12, 1981).

It seems to me that Balgan has gone through a similar psychological process: he has exorcised the period of despair following his ex-wife's death by returning to shamanism. Yet it is inadequate to suggest that Balgan has simply resurrected the same shamanism, which his ex-wife's death forced him to shed for three years. His resumption of the shaman's role was for him a means of escape from a pathological state and at the same time a resolution of a personal crisis through the religious idiom. It is, therefore, an act of transcendence of this crisis, similar to the priestess. One may argue that there exist important differences between Balgan and the priestess at the phenomenological level. Unlike the latter, Balgan is not afflicted by the spirit of his ex-wife, neither does he suffer

"a dark night of the soul" (even if he was spirit-afflicted, just like the clients of cases 4 and 11, he probably would not express his turmoil through a demonic idiom due to fear of being stigmatised as insane). Instead, he acts out his inner turmoil just as any other Russian layperson would, by means of resorting to drink. One may argue that there exists one more difference between Balgan and the priestess, of a psychological nature. The latter resorts to religion in order to expiate guilt for having betrayed a loving figure. Could it be that guilt for his ex-wife's death is the motivation that compelled Balgan to resurrect his shamanism? What can the meaning of this resurrection be under the psychological pressure of an event as tragic as the loss of a close person? Does Balgan enact (even unconsciously) a penance in expiation of guilt for his ex-wife's death by means of resuming his shamanic practice?

This is a complicated issue and I do not aim to resolve it here. As regards guilt, it exists in the vocabulary of Tuvans as *buruu*[28] (*vina*, in Russian), and, I believe, in their minds also – I express only a personal belief, since the existence of a term for "guilt" is not evidence of whether or how guilt is experienced as an emotion in a culture. Balgan did not confess guilty of his ex-wife's death during my questions about this event, though judging from the agitation in his face during his description of the tensions in their marriage (section 1.8), I would find it difficult to accept that he has not experienced something like guilt or remorse; withdrawing from life and resorting to drink as a way to cope with bereavement is sometimes an indication that the mourner feels somehow responsible for a person's death. At this stage of my research, I can only conjecture whether this loss is the motivational source of Balgan's resumption of his shamanism; that is, whether his consultations are in essence penances by means of which he attempts to heal an inner conflict. However that may be, it is unquestionable that this resumption has effected a symbolic transformation for Balgan: from an ill person that he was he has become a healing shaman. Healing is the other important element of his symbol-system (next to retribution).

3.6. The symbolism of süzük: where culture and personal experience converge

My analysis of the süzük healing for Yuri cannot be but tentative and speculative, since it is not based on a comparative examination of input from shaman and client alike, as an integral interpretation of ritual healing would necessitate. For this reason, I eschew

[28] I am informed that in Mongolian "guilt" is "*gemt buruu*" (Katherine Swancutt, personal communication).

the issue of efficaciousness, though I believe that Yuri considered this cure ineffective, and examine the meaning of süzük-healing on the basis of the input by Balgan and Maadyr (section 3.2).

I will start with a difference I found between shamanic and lay understandings of süzük after comparing the above shamans' accounts with responses I elicited from non-shamans. The latter all explained süzük as "religious faith" (*vera po religii*, in Russian), a generic definition, while to my requests for more specialised interpretations they all referred me to religious experts (shamans and lamas), something that perhaps indicates that for these persons (all close acquaintances of mine) süzük is devoid of personal meaning; in other words, they never happened to resort to a religious idiom involving the experience of süzük as a means of coping with despair. Now, Balgan's interpretation sets off from the standard meaning of süzük which the laypersons invoked, but in the process, it becomes more elaborate, enriching this term with a sequence of interrelated concepts, which together construct the symbolic order of süzük healing. Thus, the initial "faith" is – after Maadyr's intervention – complemented by "hope" and "suggestion", concepts that rest on religious faith, but also convey the ideas of transition or transformation. Finally, these concepts receive symbolic objectification in the candle, which ultimately acquires a medical symbolism also: it becomes a diagnostic and curing instrument, which Balgan treated Yuri with. Shamanic interpretations of süzük display a far greater capacity for symbolic expression than lay ones. One could say that this is expectable, since shamans like Balgan and Maadyr are by nature inventive and imaginative, as they weave together various images from shamanic and Christian repertoires.

Nevertheless, in the light of their psychobiographies, especially Balgan's, an additional explanation appears: the meanings they added to süzük reflect a process of transformation in their own lives. Maadyr was an ex-convict who turned to shamanism, while Balgan's resumption of shamanism after his ex-wife's death was discussed earlier. In their cases, süzük possesses the qualities of "personal symbols", which Obeyesekere discusses in respect of the priestesses in Sri Lanka: it articulates a cultural meaning (religious faith) with individual experience (crisis and symbolic transformation), "operating on the levels of personality and of culture at the same time" (1981: 2). A relevant example of a symbol invested with meaning at the levels of culture and personal experience alike is the bitter *margoza* leaves which many priestesses in Sri Lanka consume during their "dark night of the soul" type of experiences. At the cultural level, eating bitter leaves signifies the ascetic's disdain for ordinary food; yet, at the individual

level, this act is a symbol for the expression of guilt due to betrayal of a loved one (see Obeyesekere 1990: 12). Thus, a culturally constituted symbolism, süzük, is invested with a meaning of personal transformation which derives from the biographies of Balgan and Maadyr.

In my view, the main reason that süzük healing failed for Yuri is that he seemed to be committed in advance to the failure of the consultation and to failure as a life-attitude (the latter is what actually Balgan himself seems to suggest with his comment that Yuri fell sick of sagysh, of bad thoughts about himself). But on the basis of the above consideration of süzük as a personal symbol, we can suggest an additional explanation: the candle as a symbol articulating faith and potential for transformation could not effect a psychological change in Yuri, because he ignored the meaning of süzük as "faith"; he did not know about süzük and sagysh as a Tuvan does, therefore he did not cultivate any faith or hope that the shaman would effect an improvement and furthermore he did not hold any expectation of a transformative experience. The establishment of intersubjective consensus between Balgan and Yuri – a precondition for the successful resolution of this healing – was hampered by a discrepancy of motivation: whereas Balgan intended to symbolically instil in Yuri the hope that his situation may improve (that is, that material wealth can be accumulated anew and that he can be cured from cancer), Yuri seemed to be convinced that this is impossible, especially by means of symbolic resolutions. Under these constraints, the candle as a symbol conveying faith and transformation could not effect a psychological change in Yuri.

From his own part, Balgan attempted to induce reverberations of his personal transformation in a mind, which however was devoid of the necessary mental state (faith or hope), and was thus unreceptive to symbolic communication. We could perhaps discern a flaw in Balgan's performative strategy: he was not thoughtful enough to level down his performance to Yuri's anticipations. All Yuri wanted was a cleansing with the candle and to have his business partners punished; this can be inferred from the fact that he brought the candle and a photo of his partners, something that indicates that he wanted the consultation to be focused on these two objects. He did not ask for a "Holy Water" ritual or for a kamlaniye. Balgan's commitment to vivid performance surpassed Yuri's expectations: he over-performed. To my knowledge, this is the only case that his overflowing creativity was concluded with a failed consultation, though an exceptionally

interesting one[29].

Part II

3.7. Transition to the post-socialist context of shamanic transformation

An argument emerging from section 3.5 is that in post-Soviet Tuva the nature of the intersubjectivity between shaman and client is shifting from spirit-affliction to ordinary misfortunes. As was the case in the past, a shaman can treat a client, because he has overcome a crisis similar to his client's. But what we can make of Balgan's case is that, whereas in pre-Soviet times the shaman was related to his clients on the basis of mutual experiences of spirit-affliction, in post-Soviet times this relation is more based on shared misfortunes of everyday life which are sometimes directly related to post-socialism. In my view, the cases of Balgan and Yuri indicate the existence in Tuva of a post-Soviet operation of mistrust and hostility, which has impinged on social relations in Tuva (and, generally, throughout post-Soviet Russia).

Nevertheless, as Humphrey writes regarding the impact of post-socialist transition on the life of Russians, "it is impossible for people to live without making some sense of the world around them" (2002b: 1). Drawing from her fieldwork on collective farms in Buryatiya, this author notes that workers used a concept from local history, "serfdom", to describe their subordination to the authorities of the farm. Here, an economic actuality which was morphed during Soviet times, is conceptualised in accordance with a "repertoire of the imagination" drawn from local history; the workers recover the notion of feudalism from their own past to make sense of their dependence on the farm for a living (see 2002b: xxi). I have already presented two such paradigms from Tuva, drawn from a shaman and his clients: first, ethnic Tuvans (like Balgan and his cursed Tuvan clients) make sense of misfortunes concomitant with the post-socialist transition by means of an element of the Tuvan cultural repertoire of the imagination, kargysh (curses); second, Balgan converts his misfortunes into occurrences of personal transformation, by resorting to another one element of the Tuvan repertoire, shamanic initiation. Following, I shall delineate the post-socialist context of this transformation.

[29] To add one more exceptional event from this consultation: after Yuri was gone, Balgan asked me to write for him a Christian "spell" (zaklinaniye, as he called it) on the grounds that "as an Orthodox Christian you know about these things". I am not a religious person, though I happened to know a short prayer in Greek, which I wrote for him, using Russian characters. The example shows that, as a resourceful individual that he is, Balgan is constantly developing his ritual repertoire.

3.8. "Revenge is sweeter than reconciliation"

The acrimonious title in quotation marks is taken from Nancy Ries's vivid exposition of a common feature of life in Moscow during Soviet times: that is, nastiness and wickedness among neighbours, co-workers and relatives, which became the subject of amusingly trenchant popular stories and anecdotes[30]. A prevalent theme in these oral performances was treacherousness and rivalry among co-inhabitants in the Soviet communal apartments, spying on each other or spoiling the neighbour's meal (by spitting or even urinating in it!) to express rancour or return an offence (1997: 64). In the most extreme cases, such behaviours were motivated by a special kind of delusory – paranoid or psychotic – mentality, a consequence of long tensions among communal dwellers; according to this, a "dwelling paranoid" (*paranoid zhil'yo*, in Russian) would perceive his/her possessions as targets of a neighbour's envy or destructive intention (see Utekhin 2001). My field-notes include a few incidents of violent conflict, which show that acute canalisation of aggression is preferable to some Tuvans (and Russians living in Tuva) than a non-violent resolution or reconciliation[31]. Fights and violent conflict between relatives and closely related persons were perhaps always part of life in Tuva (either in Soviet or post-Soviet times). Characteristically, a Tuvan acquaintance of mine told me that it is not uncommon for relatives to engage in fights and throw empty bottles of vodka at each other, after I relayed incidents of aggression between relatives during dinners in commemoration of the dead[32].

Nevertheless, the situation between Yuri and his partners presents a kind of relatedness, which is pervaded by a tension or suspense radically different from quarrels and enmities described above. Yuri's suspicion of his partners as embezzling his money

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[30] To relay a well-known anecdote of this type: "A genie grants one wish each to an Englishman, a Frenchman, and a Russian; the Englishman asks for a country manor and the Frenchman for the ability to attract the most beautiful women; the Russian asks for his neighbour's house to burn down" (in Ries 1997: 63). According to Ries, with these anecdotes and stories Russians challenged the "propagandistic illustrations of the goodness of Soviet people and their indefatigable spirit of cooperation" (1997: 64), subverting thus the Soviet ideal of society as a moral community, which I introduced in section 1.3.

[31] To mention an example, a fight broke out between two male relatives and friends, which I witnessed in a town four hours away from Kyzyl. It was around 3 a.m., when the iron-made door of the apartment (where I had been invited to spend the night) quaked to the beats of somebody asking for the householder, a Russian in his mid-forties. His wife turned the unwelcome visitor away, but the pounding continued for two hours, until the Russian man and this person engaged in a fight. As my escort, who was my hosts' niece, told me the next day, her uncle had withdrawn his support from a business-project, something that caused upset to this man, who demanded his partner resume his position. I distinguish such incidents of conflict from the case studies of this thesis on the grounds that the former ones involve spontaneous and immediate canalisation of hostility, whereas the latter ones a calculated strategy of retribution through shamanic counter-cursing ritual.

[32] See footnote 5, section 2.3.

has nothing to do with nastiness between neighbours or relatives. The latter ones have little connection to social change: they appeared during the Soviet years and continue to occur[33], as normal expressions of nastiness and aggressiveness, which probably exists in all human societies. Not so with the kind of relation Yuri is involved in: this is a repercussion of the disintegration of the Soviet state and of the emergence of new forms of economic actuality led by open acquisitiveness, which undermine the supposed traditional (Soviet) ideals of trust and friendship. The root of Yuri's misfortune is "post-socialist": he is one of the myriads of Russians, who aspired to partake of the bounties of the much promising enterprise privatization of the early 1990s, investing in business (*biznes*, in Russian), which turned out to be a swindle[34] (*obman*, in Russian). If so, the same holds for Balgan's misfortune: it shows that utility and insincerity are creeping into a kind of relationship, which in Soviet times was the most authentic expression of mutual trust and loyalty, male friendship (or at least it was symbolised as such); and that the devaluing of the morals of friendship is the result of a rise in the value of money, the most needed and scarce means of making a living in post-Soviet Russia.

Ries writes that the transition from socialist economy to enterprise privatisation in Russia has undermined the value of labour (*rabota*, in Russian) as the proper means of constructing a social identity and amassing capital[35] (2002: 292; also, Yurchak 1999).

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[33] However, I should note that the communal type of living was abolished and apartments were privatised after the fall of the Soviet Union. To have an apartment privatised, one had to pay a fee to the State and to prove that he/she had lived in this apartment many years (Anna Kushkova, personal communication). The abolishment of communal living means that the kind of conflict among people sharing the same apartment does not exist any longer. Nevertheless, typical disputes between neighbours occur normally, as they did in the past: for instance, my landlady's husband had a dispute with the inhabitants of the above apartment due to noise.

[34] Ries offers a detailed and illuminative overview of the machinations deployed by the Soviet-era elites for enrichment, after privatisation was initiated by Gorbachev's 1988 decree permitting the formation of private cooperatives. Briefly, their strategy involved siphoning capital, equipment or other resources into private enterprises or the establishment of banks as covers for quasi-legal investment and money laundering (2002: 284-85). Another consequence of privatisation was the appearance in between 1992-1994 of a range of investment schemes promising enormous profits. The most well known of these was the MMM company, which turned out to be a countrywide pyramid scheme and collapsed in 1994 after investors' complaints of inability to receive their interests or withdraw their capital (2002: 287). For a fascinating discussion of the MMM company and its smart advertising campaign as a cultural phenomenon opposed to a totalitarian State, see Borenstein (1999).

[35] Arguing that a concern with amassing money existed during Soviet times might contradict the Soviet notion of the low value of money (see in the process). Certainly, shortage of commodities does not mean that money was in abundance or that people were indifferent in obtaining it. Pesmen offers ample evidence that during perestroika and in early 90s money was denigrated as much as it was sought after (2000: 126-27 ff.); I found that Balgan treated money with a similar ambivalent attitude. My understanding is that having money to live decently was more or less a real concern for the working class (e.g., factory-workers). However, this does not apply to other categories. For instance, a University professor earned 300 rubles p/m. in the 70s; a salary of this height afforded an affluent life, considering that a librarian earned only 120 rubles (Anna Kushkova, personal communication). Amassing money through private economic activities

The Soviet ideology proclaimed the working class as the force which would bring about a healthy communist society; this was expressed through public rituals honouring commitment to labour and presenting stimuli for yet higher productivity (see Lane 1981: 110). However, by the early 1990s the ideal of labour had been undermined by the ideology of capitalism, which engendered belief in the potential for enrichment by non-productive means (Mafiosi, politicians and magnates were – and are still – seen as examples of wild moneymaking and big-man politics). Opportunism set in, as a society instructed in the idea that value is created through labour had to come to terms with the mysterious forces of privatised economy where, as Ries writes, goods acquire value through trade and money begets money in a seemingly magical way (2002: 292; also, Grant 1999). The prospective of quick enrichment and the advent of consumerism in post-Soviet Russia (see Humphrey 2002a) left their mark on what was perhaps the most authentic expression of companionship in Soviet times; true friends were expected to give everything without any expectation of receiving back (see next section). Now, friendships can be established or dissolved due to the purpose of moneymaking: as Lindquist observes, there certainly exist friendships in the Russian market, but two friends will stay together as business partners only as long as their cooperation is profitable (2000: 337).

The cases of Balgan and Yuri offer telling examples of this shift in the meaning of friendship in post-Soviet Russia. As such, they indicate that the repercussions of the post-socialist transition – opportunism and its impact on relationships – have reached even as a remote corner of Russia as Tuva. The rise in the value of money and the precariousness of making a living is not a phenomenon of the Russian metropolis only, like Moscow or Novosibirsk. It is also a concern of daily life in a provincial town as Kyzyl. I want to relay an additional testimony from Balgan, which reveals the real tension underlying his clients' accusations of curse affliction and reinforces my premise that his theory of cursing out of starvation contains elements of truth (section 1.1). It was at the final stages of my fieldwork, during a long conversation I had with him about curses and the social reality of Kyzyl, when Balgan mentioned: "Do you see these sellers in the open market [of Kyzyl]? You buy products from one of them, and all the others envy him [the seller] and curse him. On a different occasion, you shop from another one, and your previous

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was impossible in Soviet times, if we exclude illegal means such as the black market (see Ries 2002: 285, for an example).

seller curses him, because he has lost money to him. So, they curse each other and each one comes here asking me to remove the curses and return them to their enemy[36]".

For me this was one of those rare and special moments in fieldwork, when the anthropologist becomes "dizzy with discovery" (Vitebsky 2005: 306). Balgan had just subverted the image of the client as the innocent victim of somebody's curse-suffused rancour, which he cultivates by means of divination. His comment reveals that the cursed client is not only a victim, but may also be an agent of curse-inflicted misfortune for another person; the latter is also an agent of such a misfortune for somebody else, and the chain of suffering a curse-inflicted misfortune and canalising frustration through cursing expands endlessly, forming a social operation of suspiciousness and accusations of curse affliction in Tuva. I cannot provide a full ethnographic documentation of this pattern, yet as a model this is confirmed by two cases of clients confessing that they cursed their enemies in my material, thus indicating that the coexistence of the curse-setter and the cursed in the same individual is a reality: the first is case 13 (section 2.5.2), while in the second (case 16) the woman who accused her employer of commissioning shamans to curse her will confess that she cursed her enemy out of indignation (see section 5.4).

Thus, it appears that interpersonal conflict touches on a pervasive concern of life in post-Soviet Russia, the need for money. In the cases of Balgan and Yuri friendship is exploited for money making; in the case of the market-sellers the insufficiency of profit creates antagonism, something expectable in any private market system. Nevertheless, there exists a crucial particularity: it may be that these three examples have a post-socialist source, yet they are differentiated from much of the precariousness, fraud and conflict in post-Soviet Russia, since their actors make sense of their misfortunes in terms of a particular element from the Tuvan repertoire of imagination, curse affliction.

Amidst the post-Soviet crisis of values, as this is manifested through the pattern of acquisitiveness, exploitation and deceit I described above, Balgan's narrative of revenge against his friends offers a paradigm for agency and action under the conditions of post-socialism. It touches on a wider social concern with trust and the uncertainty of friendship, yet it surpasses lay potentials for revenge; post-Soviet life is fraught with misery and deceit, the official mechanisms of redressing injustice do not work as they should, and any attempt to retaliate by means of physical violence is confronted with the danger of counter-violence, as well as with the risk of unpleasant legal complications. If I

[36] Balgan told me that he is able to find out whether his clients have cast a curse just by looking at them,

am right to argue that Balgan's shamanic symbol-system is at least partly a construct of post-socialism, it would not be too far-fetched to suggest that his narrative of revenge is expressive of a collective fantasy of revenge, in which myriads of people like him and Yuri indulge in contemporary Russia. Next, I shall attempt to sketch out the chronicle of change in the meaning of friendship in conjunction with a concomitant change in the pattern of survival. In doing so, I intend to show how certain cultural dispositions, or elements forming a cultural repertoire of the imagination, which operate among Tuvans inform their particular response to the post-socialist transition and, in Balgan's case, facilitate a symbolic transformation out of the ills of post-socialism.

3.9. A sketch of transition: symbolic transformation out of post-Soviet misery

A number of authors have noted the enormous importance of friendship in Soviet culture, describing it in terms of a deep emotional engagement charged with commitment and mutual trust (see Wierzbicka 1997: 55-57, Shlapentokh 1989, Lindquist 2000: 336). According to these authors, the high place of friendship in the Russian hierarchy of values suggests that the formation of intimate relationships provided a defence against the political surveillance and pressure which the Soviet state exercised upon its citizens. Under this constraint, a close relationship between two persons had to survive the crucial political test of trust for a friendship to be established, since, as Shlapentokh observes, the persecution of dissidents extended to their acquaintances (1989: 173). Friends could swap news they had heard on foreign radio broadcasts or discuss impressions from travels abroad, without fear of being reported on the authorities. Hence, friendship was a cult of intimacy, which functioned as a compensation for the suspicion and cold impersonality of public life; this, according to Shlapentokh, explains why the Soviet State was suspicious of, if not hostile to, close relationships (1989: 172).

In Soviet times, you could not choose whom you would live with in a communal apartment, since you were in a housing queue and took what you got (see Humphrey 1999: 5); perhaps, this is the cause of the famed antipathy among Russian neighbours. Likewise, you could not choose a political identity, since this was imposed by the State. But the choice of friends was a personal prerogative in accordance with one's ideological beliefs and aesthetic tastes. To quote Lindquist, "choosing friends in the Soviet era was one of the few expressions of agency, a truly free choice that was left to the Soviet

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though he was not any more specific about this.

person" (2000: 336). Intimacy prescribed unlimited access to one's personal space and time for revealing a secret or seeking advice. Friends played a prohibited role, which, one could argue, has been taken over by shamans in post-Soviet Tuva (or by psychotherapists, such as Oktyabrina Tuprina in Yakutsk[37]): that of psychologists or priests in the confessional, as Lindquist observes (2000: 336)

The word for "friend" in Russian is "*droug*" (plural: *druz'ya*)[38]. Apart from offering psychological support and counselling, a friend was charged with the obligation of lending money to a needy friend. Friendship (*druzhba*, in Russian) between two individuals meant that no objection should be raised about the amount requested; this could work up to many wages accumulated over years of saving. Lindquist says that the high moral value of friendship in Soviet Russia safeguarded these unwritten and informal contracts, making them hard to violate (2000: 336). Yet it seems to me that this sentimental state of consciousness existed along with a speculative one. The above author remarks that breaching an agreement founded on the value of friendship would lead the violator to lose credibility with the social group and thus to undermine relationships life-sustaining for him/her (2000: 337). This suggests that trust (*doveriye*, in Russian) in the benefited party's will to commit himself to an informal contract was sustained by two complementary – rather than antithetical – states of mind: an adherence to the morals of friendship and a pragmatics of coping with life in one's self-interest (cf. Pesmen 2000: 134-35). Simply put, I am confident that my friend will return the loan, because we are good friends and because he will lose face before our community, risking even starvation, if he deceives me.

I would like to dwell on the articulation of sentimental and pragmatic aspects of

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[37] See footnote 27 (section 3.5).

[38] In Soviet times, the word "*tovarishch*", roughly rendered as "comrade" in English, was being used to communicate a political sense of solidarity. Wierzbicka writes that "tovarishch" was a sign of belonging (to the Communist Party), while losing the right to address others (and be addressed) as such was equivalent to exclusion and a prelude to incarceration and death (1997: 71). According to the same source (ibid. 1997: 73), political dissidents also were related to each other as "*tovarishchy*" (plural), comrades risking their lives to live up to an ideal in defiance of the regime; thus, a term expressing mutual commitment to the Soviet ideology, was being subversively used by a marginal segment of Russian society as a symbol of solidarity against the Soviet ideology. After the downfall of communism, the political meaning of the term quickly started to recede and its colloquial use survived in such expressions of solidarity as "*shkol'nyy tovarishch*" ("school friend") or "*tovarishch po rabote*" ("fellow-worker"). As Wierzbicka observes, what these different uses of tovarishch have in common is the idea of a bond based on shared life experiences, a shared "lot" (ibid.1997: 72). Yet the term can be used today to denote a typical (even formal!) sense of solidarity, independent of shared experiences. The Russian host (footnote 32), who spent a night on the sofa so that I would sleep comfortably on his bed, coldly gave the following reply to his wife asking what he would have for lunch (after a difficult night, I am sure): "whatever (our) tovarishch here". The example reveals the subtlety of emotional expression, which a standard word for "togetherness" can afford: a term denoting solidarity can be used to communicate its very opposite, desire for severance.

Russian friendship a bit further with reference to a practice of exchange, which was flourishing during Soviet times. This is the custom of *blat*[39], a range of shadowy forms of exchange involving illegal use of personal networks for obtaining commodities under conditions of shortage (Ledeneva 1998, 2000: 163-64; Pesmen 2000: 135; Corten 1992: 29). For example, a high state-official could take advantage of his connection with the head of a *glavk*[40] and buy hard to find products on site, promising to use his position in order to fulfil a favour his acquaintance may have in the future[41]. The same purpose could be achieved by pulling through relatives or friends holding key-positions in the mechanisms of production (see Nielsen 2004: 95). Resistance to constraints posed by the Soviet system pulled people to relationships, where sentiment and practical reason were inextricably woven and fostered each other[42]. The attempt to overcome shortage by "beating the system" committed millions of people to bonds of dependence forming a network, which is losing its significance in the post-Soviet age. Consumerism is possible nowadays not only in a Russian metropolis but also in Kyzyl, where expensive products of international origin (such as cigars and French champagnes) have started to appear in the commercial centres of the town; yet for the majority of the population – both in the metropolis and in Kyzyl – consumerism is unattainable due to sordid poverty.

Thus, my point: State-imposed limitations in the allotment of products generated a network of interpersonal alliances as covert strategies of countering shortage, which were informed by trust and reciprocity. These unwritten contracts were difficult to breach, as long as both partners aspired to each other's future assistance in securing commodities and services. This points to the low importance of money for life during the Soviet years; as Pesmen observes, a job was more valuable for the people, services and commodities it gave access to than for the salary[43] (2000: 135). The disintegration of the Soviet state and the transition to open market-economy eroded these patterns of sociality. Though I have not systematically probed into the meanings of friendship in the Tuvan context, Balgan's

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[39] This is a noun, which literally means "pull" or "influence".

[40] It refers to the central directorates for distributing products, which were under the ministry of trade. According to Lindquist, they were "the loci of the decision-making power directing certain goods to certain stores in certain quantities" (2000: 331).

[41] This example suggests that blat could be viewed as a form of barter, since, according to Humphrey and Hugh-Jones (1992: 1), barter may involve trading things different in kind or things for services.

[42] Ledeneva vividly illustrates this in her comment that: "The fact of a kindness granted to an acquaintance even bestowed some benefit on the donor, as it earned the donor *gratitude* and *loyalty*, and therefore nurtured a relationship which could result in reciprocation of favours granted, and thus prove *useful*" (1998: 179; emphasis mine).

[43] This was expressed through a well-known joking curse: "may you live on your salary alone!" (Pesmen 2000: 132; also, in Nielsen 2004: 98).

case suggests that *naiyral* (friendship, in Tuvan) is pervaded by the ideas of loyalty and commitment, just as in the Russian (and any) context: Balgan did not hesitate to give big sums of money to his friends[44], something that parallels the ideal of incalculable sharing of money between friends, which I sketched above[45]. His and Yuri's monetary fraud is a local manifestation of a broad phenomenon as a repercussion of the dissolution of the socialist State: the erosion of traditional patterns of sociality, which placed a premium on trust at the expense of speculation and accumulation, as a result of the increasing value of (and dependence on) money for making a living. In the Soviet years, concerns of survival were centralised in the State as the enemy or the obstacle one had to defeat or transcend in order to live. People had to conduct through life within a universe of prohibitions and instructions regarding fundamental economic activities, such as production and exchange, which one could not but transgress in his attempt to secure a decent living. Under such constraints, people resorted to relationships based on exchange of products and services (relationships that in many instances evolved into lasting friendships built on trust and intimacy), creating thus a nation-wide operation of conspiracy against a State, which they – at least officially – sustained either as bureaucrats and officials and/or as adherents to the socialist ideology. The disappearance of the totalitarian enemy inevitably led to the disintegration of this conspiratorial network; in the absence of a centralised surveillance authority, anxieties of survival were diffused among these relationships, which were life-sustaining in the Soviet years: friends, relatives, co-workers, and persons with access to the mechanisms of production and distribution (private market-sellers are one post-Soviet transformation of this role).

Nevertheless, as I argued already, in Tuva misfortune can be understood in terms of a *particular* "habit of mind", curse affliction. This needs explanation. The particularity I discern in my informants' response to the post-socialist transition should not be read as an attempt to discover a "traditional" pattern of mentality, which sets Tuvans apart from the rest of the citizens of post-Soviet Russia; in my view, this position leads to misinterpreting this response as hindering these peoples' attempts to adapt themselves to the processes of socio-economic transition affecting their lives (in which they actively participate). As I showed in section 3.3, curse accusation is a common response to misfortune for individuals of different nationalities living in post-Soviet Tuva, something

[44] See also his narrative, section 1.6.

that renders untenable a representation of cursing as an expression unique to Tuvan culture. Suspicions and accusations of curse affliction are certainly elements of a cultural repertoire of ethnic Tuvans; nonetheless, these elements are not exclusively or essentially "Tuvan".

Humphrey makes a similar point about "Russian culture". According to this, the difficulties in understanding post-Soviet Russia by means of terms developed to explain Euro-American actualities, e.g., the "market", should not force us into essentialising Russian culture, seeing it as something preventing people from acting in accordance with a universal set of practices (2002b: xx). We should rather conceptualise the various cultural dispositions constituting post-Soviet "Russian culture", such as the unsafe business-actualities Yuri participates in, as particular manifestations of a universal category, which are common to all citizens of post-Soviet Russia. To quote Humphrey, "we have to take account of common responses across post-Soviet space, aligning Russians with non-Russian peoples such as the Buryats, Tyvans [Tuvans], and Mongolians" (2002b: xx). Drawing on my Tuvan material, I identified a particular response to the havoc of post-communism; comparative research will reveal how far operations of curse accusation or other similar responses have appeared elsewhere in post-socialist Russia.

Still, if we consider Balgan, it is insufficient to say that the particularity of the Tuvan response consists in that certain elements from the cultural repertoire of the imagination, that is, cultural dispositions or symbolic idioms, help people to "construe whole social fields or emerging institutions" (Humphrey 2002b: xxi). Balgan does not only employ such an idiom, curse affliction, to make sense of misfortune in post-Soviet Tuva; as we saw, he has effected a self-transformation by responding to crisis and misfortune with another element of the repertoire of the imagination, shamanic initiation. In this sense, he has effected a transformation of the grim and precarious world he lives in (even if he himself does not put it in this way). Post-communist misery is for him not the end of hope, but the era of new potentialities for shamanic transformation; the constituents of his shamanic symbol-system, retribution and healing, emanate from the painful contours of life in post-Soviet Tuva, enabling him to convert his misfortunes into signs of transformation and to take action against the evils of his world by treating clients

[45] Incidentally, druzhba (friendship) is the name of a central street of Kyzyl, perhaps the only public symbol to remind the Tuvans of the importance of friendship in the Soviet years; while, naiyral is the name of the cinema of Kyzyl, close to the central square.

for curses. Balgan has converted post-communist poverty and despair into a ground rich in potentials for transformation, which, I believe, will add new elements to his symbol-system, for as long as precariousness pervades life in Tuva.

3.10. Conclusion

In this chapter I have put forward what I consider as a new argument regarding the revived form of shamanism in the post-Soviet age: drawing on Balgan's biography, I argued that ordinary misfortune supplements the classical motif of spirit election (or affliction) to develop shamanic initiation through further transformation. To support this argument, I identified an analogy between Balgan and his client on the basis of mutual (ordinary) misfortune and suggested that as a shaman Balgan differs from this client on the grounds that he has effected a symbolic self-transformation out of these misfortunes. This analogy led me to probe beneath the level of surface reality and to identify the motivational sources of the ritual practice of a revivalist shaman, Balgan: the constituents of his symbol-system, retribution and healing, send taproots to two events having intense personal meaning for him, his friends' deceit and his first wife's death. Thus, in Balgan's case what we might call "shamanic revival" has two facets. The first is at once observable, since for the most part it is the shaman himself who presents it to his clients, whether ethnographers or Tuvans consulting him: Balgan's official narrative is that he turned to shamanism after the spirit of his grandmother touched him, his formal election and the insignia of his self-designation as a hereditary shaman. By contrast, the second is hidden in the shaman's psychobiography and might even be something he is not aware of.

My analysis of Balgan suggests that "shamanic revival" can also be viewed as a "personal symbol" in Obeyesekere's formulation. At the cultural level, Tuvan laypeople (and ethnographers) view it as a social institution consisting of individuals who form an elite on the basis of an inner faculty (appearing either after spirit-election or affliction). Yet, at the individual level, "shamanic revival" is invested with a deeper meaning: it offers a way to Balgan – and to the other Balgans of Tuva[46] – to convert personal misfortunes into occurrences of transformation by employing a particular element from the Tuvan cultural repertoire of the imagination, shamanic initiation.

[46] Clearly, Balgan cannot be the only individual in Tuva who resolved a crisis by turning to shamanism.

Chapter 4. Soviet persecution as a "rite of passage" to shamanic transformation

2nd case study: *Anna's accusation – the wrath of the dead*

4.1. Introductory note

I have briefly introduced this case study on p. 65. The characters involved in this consultation, which took place only a few days after the consultation with Yuri, are: Anna, a middle-aged Russian woman, her ex-husband and the ghost of their dead son. At the core of this case study there lies a legal conflict between Anna and her ex-husband over ownership of property, which has been running for three years. Anna claimed that she and her ex-husband co-owned two houses, one in the city of Minusinsk (Krasnoyarsk region) and one in Kyzyl. After divorcing, Anna and her ex-husband agreed that if these properties were sold, the revenue would be shared between them. Yet her ex-husband sold their house in Minusinsk without returning to Anna her share. This led Anna to take legal action against him. A few months before this consultation, the ex-husband moved from Minusinsk to Kyzyl and sued Anna for occupying illicitly the house in which she now lives with their daughter. One year before this consultation, their son died. Anna has been facing problems in walking ever since. The cause of the divorce and of the ensuing conflict is a young mistress with whom Anna's husband had fled to Minusinsk.

Anna held her ex-husband responsible for her health problems; as she believed, he had commissioned shamans to kill her with cursing. Balgan performed a divination and confirmed her accusation. Additionally, he divined that her ex-husband was implicated in the death of their son: he had commissioned these shamans not only to kill Anna, but also their son, in order to absorb the latter's vitality and enjoy his mistress (who was of his son's age). Anna wanted to have her ex-husband punished for his misdeeds.

I elicited most of the above information from Balgan, since I missed the initial part of the interaction, where Balgan discusses with the client the nature of the problem. Yet some of this information was repeated during the subsequent parts, which I observed. My reconstruction of Anna's case is thus based on fragmentary data.

The consultation consisted of two sessions. The first took place in the Association and the second in Anna's house. I have divided the exposition into two Parts, each of them referring to one of these two sessions. In Part I, I present the events of the first session and examine two major themes emerging from it: Balgan's biographical narrative of Soviet repression, revenge on the Soviets and assumption of the shamanic profession, which he recites after Anna's narrative of her misfortunes; and the interaction between

Balgan and me by means of which we establish that a very powerful curse is the cause of Anna's misfortunes (4.2). In section 4.3, I revisit the issue of Balgan's symbolic transformation, which I introduced in the previous case study: drawing on his narrative, I present one more level of symbolic transformation, which originates in the age of Soviet repression. Accordingly, drawing on an analogy I discern between Balgan and Anna, I argue that Balgan's recitation is aimed at inducing a transformative experience in Anna. Also, I consider how our performative interaction which establishes the powerful curse, cultivates anxiety (offering in this way a prelude to the subtle and complex interaction between Balgan and me, running throughout the second session). In section 4.4, I probe beneath the surface reality, conjecturing that in drawing a transformative meaning out of his experience of Soviet repression, Balgan has invoked another element from the cultural repertoire of the imagination, Tuvan epic mythology; I ground this on several analogies between Balgan's narrative and the myth of the Tuvan hero. In Part II I present the events of the second session (4.5): we will see Balgan in a performance which relieves as much as intensifies Anna's anxiety, a process during which he involves me (and even my supervisor in Cambridge). In section 4.6 I scrutinize the array of themes his performance opens, focusing on two of them: his revelation of a graveyard under Anna's house and his plea to Anna to forgive her ex-husband. I shall draw a tentative connection between these two themes, suggesting that as a symbolism of pre-ordained misfortune, the revelation of the graveyard directs the ritual proceedings of the session away from revenge to a mood of resolution by means of forgiving the enemy.

Part I

4.2. 1st session

Anna was being treated when I arrived at the Association. At that time, Balgan was removing doora from her body, starting from her feet and moving upwards, as he had done with Yuri. He rushed out to throw it in the yard. When he returned, he sat exhausted in his chair saying that this was not a simple curse, but something more powerful. He involved me in the diagnosis of the cause of Anna's misfortunes. I relay our dialogue:

Balgan (to me): This is kargysh, chatka. Explain to her what they mean.

Kostas: Kargysh is a very dangerous form of curse and it might even lead to death, unless the cursed person is not cleansed. Chatka is even more dangerous…

Balgan: This is super-kargysh.

Kostas: It is a form of curse which can be spread like an epidemic. If somebody has sent chatka against you, it passes on to the first person you meet. It is spread like a contagious disease[1]. Why, what's going on?

Balgan: Her ex-husband is attacking her with chatka. He is employing shamans to curse her in order to take hold of her house.

Anna: I divorced from my husband three years ago and we have been in conflict ever since. Last year my son died (she is sobbing at that moment) and I fell sick, I couldn't walk. He collapsed and died suddenly, while he was out with his friends (still sobbing).

Balgan: This is due to proklyatiye (curse, in Russian). I have to cleanse your house also, because there is much proklyatiye there. You will start feeling better after this cure. I cure people by giving energy. There is so much energy within me, that I can cure people without any break for a week. Is that right (to me)?

Kostas: Certainly.

Balgan (telling Anna about me): He is an educated man (*uchionyi chelovek*, in Russian) from England. He has been studying with me for a year. He has learnt many things here.

Balgan went on to narrate a part of his biography referring to the persecution of his family by the Soviets and to his subsequent progress:

Recently I was offered a big house, to accommodate the Association. Soon, we'll move there. I got it from the government as a compensation for the repression my family suffered during the Soviet years. They also gave me a Volga car for the same reason. I remember it was December of 1961, when the authorities burnt the tent where my grandparents lived and killed them. My grandmother was a renowned shaman and my grandfather was a lama. I was living with them, and that night my grandmother sent me back home. I didn't suspect anything, and I did as she told me. My grandmother gave me all the precious items she had in the tent[2] and she sent me home. I arrived late in my parent's house. As soon as my father, who was my grandmother's son, saw all the things I brought with me, he said: "Why did they give you all these things? Tomorrow, I'll go there and find out what's going on". Next morning a person known to my father told us that the previous night the police had killed them. This means that my grandmother had a presentiment about what would happen, this is why she sent me away.

Anna: She had an intuition.

Balgan: Indeed. I went with my father to my grandparents' tent, which was erected in an islet in the middle of a river. The tent was burnt and there was soot coming out from the remains. Some policemen were also there. I looked at the remnants of the tent and I saw my grandparents' bones on the ground. I started crying and calling them. My grandmother's brother, Cherlik-kham, the "mad shaman" as people used to call him,

[1] This is a meaning of chatka, which Balgan had told me about in the early stages of my fieldwork.
[2] Later Balgan told me that these items were his grandmother's shamanic instruments which, as he told me, he has been keeping hidden in a cave ever since.

came close and told me that I should not be crying, because their souls had flown to the sky. He took the bones and we set off to *Kara-Bulung*, the village where my grandmother was born, to do the funeral. We constructed a *bazyryk*, a burial tomb made of stones, and Cherlik invoked their souls to learn about the circumstances of their death. He conversed with my grandmother, who told him that the Head of the police department in the town of Shagonar had burned the tent. Some days later, Cherlik was killed. He had been invited to perform a ritual in a place called Khaiyrakan. On his way back an NKVD agent[3] named Makarov shot him. We buried him in the same place where his sister, my grandmother, was buried.

After my grandmother died, I went through much hardship and starvation. I changed many places with my family. I went to Shagonar to study, but I was not accepted, because of my shamanic descent. I was sent to Kyzyl, where I studied until the 11th class. The years in the school were very difficult for me. The teachers treated me like an animal, because my ancestors were shamans. But all my classmates respected me, because Tuvan people know that it is not good to "touch" (to offend) a shaman's son. But the communists, the teachers and the officers, did not understand this. Some time after they offended me, they fell sick and died. I do not think badly about these people, but they paid for the offence with their lives. After that, I realised that it was my first name, Kara-ool, that took revenge on these people. What does my name mean in Russian (asking me)?

Kostas: It means "retribution" (*Kara*, in Russian).

Balgan: What does it mean in Tuvan?

Kostas: It means "black" (*Kara*, in Tuvan).

[At this point, Balgan is relaying his narrative of revenge; see section 1.6]

Later, I studied in the advanced school of administration in Moscow. After that, I returned to Kyzyl to take up a post as a manager of the hunting Association. In 1988, the spirit of my grandmother appeared before me. I remember I was reading a book at night, when she suddenly turned up and asked me to give her my hand. She touched me and disappeared instantly. Since that moment everything changed, I was feeling as if I were not walking on earth, but flying. I began to treat people, but I also kept running the hunting Association. In 1992 I gave up running this Association to work as a shaman in the Association "Düngür".

After this, Balgan burned artysh (juniper) and cleansed Anna, completing circles around her body. He then removed doora from her head and feet. The consultation ended with Balgan and Anna arranging a cleansing ritual in her house for the following day.

[3] The initials NKVD refer to *Narodnyi Kommisariat Vnutrenikh Del* (Peoples' Commissariat for Internal Affairs), a secret agency, which handled issues of national security during the Soviet period. NKVD was responsible for mass repression and executions of "anti-Soviet elements".

4.3. The avenging hero: shamanic transformation out of Soviet persecution

In the previous case study (section 3.5) I established three stages of Balgan's transformation into a shaman: first, his election by his shaman-grandmother, second, his money loss, and third, the death of his ex-wife. I argued that these events provided the onset for successively attaining an advanced state: the first, the vision of his grandmother touching him, marked his formal initiation into shamanism and bestowed him with the insignia of the hereditary shaman; the second led him to realise the property of revenge intrinsic in his first name, while the third led him to revive his shamanism as an act of transcending a personal crisis. Now, based on his biographical narrative above, I want to establish one more level of symbolic transformation, which, in contrast to the three previous ones, is rooted in the age of Soviet repression. This is the killing of Balgan's grandparents by the Soviets, an event that provided the impetus for the revelation of his retaliatory faculty; and, one could add, a primal event that triggered the actualisation of this faculty against the representatives of the Soviet system.

Returning to the two ordinary events of Balgan's transformation, his money-loss and the death of his first wife, I conjectured that Balgan has not seen in them the initiatory implications which I saw (section 3.5). Not so with a feature of his narrative above, his grandmother's bestowal of her shamanic instruments to her grandson (and successor) the night before her death. Balgan himself observes that this happened because his grandmother had a presentiment[4] about her imminent death; that is, he interprets this act as a symbolic one, investing it with a meaning which looks forward to his own personal transformation. This is an additional example of the shaman's capacity for symbolisation of events possessing a common meaning for most laypersons, which I established in relation to the meaning of suzuk (section 3.6). In the above act of bestowal a layperson might see an ordinary act of bequeathing a memento. But in Balgan's interpretation this act is invested with a transformative meaning, since it presages his transformation into a shaman, which concludes his narrative. The revelatory structure of this narrative is evidence in itself that Balgan has reflected on the symbolism of this act and worked out its transformative implications. My premise that Balgan is conscious of the initiatory implications of this bestowal is reinforced by the following comment he once made about his grandmother's death: "What did the Soviets achieve in repressing shamanism? Nothing! My grandmother sacrificed herself so that I would continue the

[4] In his narrative Balgan used the Russian word for "presentiment", *predchuvstviye*.

tradition". Clearly, Balgan has rationalised this old misfortune and its transformative meaning; his reflection on his experiences of repression shows that he has perceived a structural pattern of affliction and symbolic transformation. On recounting this here, I believe that he intends to instil a similar pattern in Anna. In section 3.6 I suggested that Balgan attempted to instil in Yuri his potential for transformation by means of a symbol, the candle; here, we see him attempting the same with Anna by means of performing his narrative. It is hard to judge the effectiveness of this performance due to lack of input from Anna, though we can note a particular moment in the narrative, the reference to the grandmother's presentiment and Anna's response that she had intuition, which may show that an intersubjectivity based on a mutual experience of loss of a beloved person was established between Balgan and Anna; or that Balgan had managed to draw Anna into his narrative as a step towards inducing an experience of psychological transformation in her.

I would like to dwell a bit on the process of Balgan's attempt to instil his potential for symbolic transformation in Anna. First, I suggest that Balgan uses his narrative for a therapeutic purpose and that he believes in its effectiveness in relieving dismay and inducing a psychological change. Once again, we find here the tendency for divesting shamanic speech of elements of occult initiatory experience and bringing it on a par with the clients' misfortunes (section 3.5). Just as in the case of Yuri, Balgan has been through a misfortune reminiscent of Anna's misfortune: he went through repression which entailed the killing of his grandmother, just as Anna is undergoing a conflict with her ex-husband, which entailed their son's death. Here, Balgan's creativity and performative acumen are revealed in an explicit manner; on listening to Anna relaying her misfortune, he grasps the analogy between them and employs his biographical narrative as a means of inducing in her reverberations of his own transformation from a victim of repression to a retaliator against the evildoer. By this I do not mean that Balgan intends to trigger in Anna a potential for symbolisation of misfortune on the scale of his own; clearly, his purpose is not to induce in Anna a re-enactment of his own initiatory experiences in order to lead her to transcend her crisis by becoming a shaman – unlike Levi-Strauss's famous argument that the effectiveness of shamanistic curing derives from the shaman's capacity for re-enacting his initiatory call for each client, who transcends a problem on the pattern of the shaman's initiatory crisis and becomes a shaman in her own right[5] (1963a: 180-81;

[5] Levi-Strauss constructs this argument on the example of a shaman's curing practices among the Kwakiutl people in northwest Canada. The transformation of the cured client into a shaman might be possible within the "shamanic" tradition of the Kwakiutl (which is different from Siberian shamanism), but this is rather

also, 1963b). As regards Balgan, there is no way to know whether during his narration he was reliving the trauma of Soviet repression, an event of initiatory significance for him. Unquestionably, Balgan attempts to relieve Anna's distress by cultivating empathy between them on the basis of a mutual experience of suffering. Yet we could follow Levi-Strauss's argument, at least to the extent of suggesting that the effectiveness of shamanistic curing consists in inducing the client to live a transformative experience – though not necessarily of the same quality as that of the shaman. What Balgan intends is, I think, to draw Anna into a narrative in which misfortune can be overcome.

Now, I would like to dwell briefly on the interaction between Balgan and me in the beginning of this consultation. To refer to the data: instead of diagnosing the cause of Anna's misfortunes himself, as he used to do on such occasions, Balgan assigns this task to me. He only renders this cause in terms of a vague mention of something stronger than a curse and leaves to me the task of defining which kind of curses fits best to Anna's misfortunes. I assume that his observation about the seriousness of this affliction is intended to give me a signal about which kind of curses to apply to Anna's case. I define her misfortunes as the result of kargysh; Balgan adds the category of chatka, and I explain to Anna the meaning of these terms at his request. It appears that Balgan involves me in the definition of Anna's misfortunes in order to intensify and cultivate her anxiety.

This indicates that in an improvisational way Balgan compels me to engage in his performance of creating an ambience of dreadful sensations by asking me to expound on the most extreme kinds of cursing[6]. Using a metaphor from theatre, we could describe the ethnographer here as a "prop", which Balgan manipulates for the purposes of the session. His intention is, I believe, to create a self-image as a powerful and experienced shaman, who prefers to assign to his young apprentice a task as effortless as identifying a particular type of cursing as the cause of Anna's misfortunes. By means of this assignment which acquires a special validity, since it is pronounced by an apprentice who is an educated (uchionyi) foreigner committed to studying him, Balgan constructs his own personal authority and efficacy; his strategy paves the way for him to intervene after his apprentice's definitions and to take action, by attempting to offer a psychological

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unlikely to happen in Tuva (and generally in Siberia), since, as I argued for Yuri (section 3.5), Tuvan society would not recognise as shamans individuals lacking the precondition of election by an ancestral shamanic spirit or of affliction by a terrible spiritual force (albys).

[6] The construction of an ambience of anxiety is also reported in the literature on classic Tuvan shamanism, where, according to Kenin-Lopsan (1987: 100-101), the shaman would secure clients by drawing them into the ritual by means of poetic metaphors of dismay and disaster.

relief to Anna. And, in addition to this goal, Balgan is reasonably interested in securing income, since two more sessions are necessary for the doora to be completely removed in cases of serious curse affliction. This is the only consultation in my material, where the definition of the client's misfortune involves me at Balgan's request: both the shaman and his apprentice join forces in the construction of a dramatic performance of curse-inflicted misfortune, which is intended to alarm Anna. I must declare that there was no such intention on my own part, but I found myself in an unpredictable situation, where I had but two options: either to comply with Balgan's masterful skills of cultivating anxiety or disobey his calling and thus undermine his performance (as well as our good relation).

In this section I established one more level of Balgan's symbolic transformation, which originates in the years of Soviet repression. His hereditary property of retaliation, a vital part of his symbol-system, was triggered by an event having transformative – even initiatory – implications for him: the killing of his grandparents by the Soviets, something that brought a close to the happy and abundant period of his early life next to Kara-Kys and led him (and his family) to suffer repression and hardships. His retaliatory faculty is revealed after his teachers' insults; these are an important component of the initiatory process, since they mark Balgan's transformation from a victim of repression to a young hero avenging the Soviets' misdeeds (though this retaliatory force is actualised independently of Balgan's consciousness). In the next section, I shall probe beneath the level of this transformation, attempting an analogy between Balgan and the hero in Tuvan epic mythology. On the basis of a number of similarities between Balgan's narrative and the hero's story, I shall suggest that the transformative meaning that Balgan has derived from his experiences of Soviet repression could be the result of his employing another one element from the cultural repertoire of the imagination, Tuvan epic mythology, in order to make sense of these experiences. In this sense, the myth of Tuvan hero may have provided a cultural template for Balgan to effect a symbolic self-transformation out of Soviet repression.

4.4. Analogy extended to the mythical past: Balgan and the Tuvan hero

Research in the epic traditions of Central and Inner Asia has underscored the similarity between the narrative-structure of heroic tales and of shamanistic ritual. The singer's performance of heroic legends and poems parallels the shaman's accounts of his vicissitudes during supernatural journeys in other realms (see Reichl 1992; Taube 1984).

Below, I present some parts from a Tuvan epic; the reader will notice several striking similarities between the story of the Tuvan hero and Balgan's biographical narrative:

In the river Ak-Khem, there was Mioge Bayan-Toolai living with his old lady…to the elder couple's great joy, the wife of Bayan-Toolai gave birth to a son. A big celebration was held for this event. The young boy grew up very quickly, and he was already running ten days after his birth.

However, Karaty-Khan, who had a lot of children, but only a few cattle, came and settled in front of the tent (*aal*) of Bayan-Toolai. Karaty-Khan was planning to capture Bayan's cattle and poison him. The Khan sent his people to Bayan with an invitation to visit him. The old man did not want to visit the Khan, but he could not refuse. You see, the Khan himself invited the old man, a lay (*karachal*) person!

Karaty-Khan poisoned Bayan-Toolai with *araka*[7], killed his wife, took their son, their property and cattle, and enslaved the citizens of his camp. The young boy was employed as a herder. His life became very difficult….

On the advice of a foal, the young boy ran away from the Khan. Close to a huge sheer cliff he found his boots, clothes, saddle, bridle, bow and arrows. When the young boy mounted the foal, it became a big horse, and gave to his master the name Mioge Sagaan-Toolai.

Mioge Sagaan-Toolai went hunting. In his absence, his aal was plundered. From a note, which his wife left in a vessel, he learned that she had been kidnapped, and that the tent was plundered by the monster Amyrga Kara-Moos. Sagaan Toolai went to find Kara-Moos, burst into his rich aal, and with the help of his wife and of his horse he killed the monster.

After that, he returned to his camp. Mioge Sagaan-Toolai took revenge on Karaty-Khan and lived peacefully in his camp.

(Grebnev 1960:10-11)

Similar motifs appear in another version of this tale. Ak-Khan and Kadyn-Kara attack Mioge Bayan-Dalai, kill him, destroy his tent and enslave his citizens. His wife escapes and gives birth to a son, who grows up in poverty. The young hero comes across a relative who hands over to him his father's armament. Finally, he attacks the tents of his father's killers, takes back his property and liberates his citizens (ibid.1960: 9-10).

Here, I will focus on the contrast between the hero and the Khan, as this is represented in these and other similar tales, which, as I mentioned, display several similarities to Balgan's biographical narrative. The hero is distinguished from laymen on the basis of his extraordinary physical abilities and his high moral attitude and infallible judgement. The epic texts emphasise that, even since childhood, the hero displays exceptional strength, courage and endurance in hunting, in the achievement of various feats and in his struggles with enemies. These features culminate in the prevalence of the

hero who defeats his enemies and establishes social order. As such, the hero personifies the Tuvan ideals of vigour and military valour (ibid.1960: 24-25). By contrast, the Khan is represented as the oppressive feudal-lord and a detestable enemy of the lay people. In many tales, the hero changes into a poor layman on arrival at the Khan's camp and meets the Khan's shepherds, who tell him about the cruelty of their lord. Finally, the hero confronts the enemy and liberates the nation.

Another genre, which focuses on the confrontation between a heroic figure and an oppressive regime, is the stories of the shaman's revenge on the Soviets – one could say that, as an anti-Soviet hero, the shaman is the continuation of the Tuvan folk hero in the Soviet age. As an example of these stories, which claim to describe real events, I will relay the account of the famous female shaman, *Kham-Urug*, who was persecuted by a native Soviet official. This shaman was ordered to give up practising shamanism, but her insistence led her to prison. The official found out that she had performed a curing ritual and ordered her arrest. Kham-Urug was imprisoned and she cursed the official: "The insidious bastard! How much he hated me! He deserves the same (hate)". A week later, while he was approaching the homeland of Kham-Urug, the official vomited blood and died instantly. He had been struck by the shaman's curses (Kenin-Lopsan 2002: 130-31).

The comparison between the above tales and Balgan's narrative reveals a number of similarities, which I present below:

1. In the epic tales, evil and insidious Khans attack the camp of the hero, loot his property and enslave his people. In the tale of Sagaan-Toolai, Karaty-Khan kills the hero's parents and forces the young hero to work as a shepherd. In the variant of this tale, the Khans kill the hero's father, but the latter's wife escapes and gives birth to the hero. Likewise, the Soviets burn down the tent where Balgan's grandparents were sleeping. Balgan sees his grandparents' bones on the ground and cries.

2. The hero of the epic tale grows up in poverty. In the tale of Sagaan-Toolai, the hero is forced into the difficult life of the shepherd. Likewise, after the death of his grandmother, Balgan experiences poverty and privations in his wanderings with his parents. In addition, the hero of the epic tales displays extraordinary physical strength and skill in hunting. In a parallel fashion, the student Balgan is possessed of the extraordinary potency for revenge which is revealed through the death of representatives of the Soviet system.

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[7] Alcoholic beverage made from fermented milk.

3. Another common feature is the bestowal of equipment to the young hero. In Balgan's narrative, Kara-Kys hands over to her grandson (and successor) her shamanic instruments the night before she dies. In a variant form of the Tuvan epic given above, the father hands over to his son the weapons, which were being kept in a cave (Grebnev 1960: 17-20); it will be remembered that Balgan hid in a cave the shamanic instruments of Kara-Kys (see footnote 2)[8].

4. Revenge on the oppressive regime is one more common feature between the Tuvan epic, the shaman's story (above) and Balgan's narrative. For instance, Sagaan-Toolai takes revenge on Karaty-Khan for the plunder of his camp and the killing of his parents. Similarly, the Soviet official dies from the shaman's curses in retribution for the persecution she underwent. In his narrative, Balgan's first name takes revenge on the Soviets in retribution for the death of his grandparents and the hardships he underwent.

On the basis of the above comparison, an explicit analogy can be established between Balgan's narrative and the epic of the Tuvan hero; the former is an echo or refraction of the Tuvan epic. I did not research how popular these epics are among contemporary Tuvans, yet it is difficult to accept that this analogy is a coincidence. This clearly cannot be the case for Balgan who has an interest in Tuvan history and regularly referred to the epoch of feudalism, which, according to him, is equivalent to capitalism[9]. My impression of him is that he has a thorough knowledge of the Tuvan folk literature, which he systematically used to read when there were no clients to treat (unfortunately, this literature was written in Tuvan, therefore I could not read it; but in one instance, Balgan mentioned that he was reading short stories of encounters between spirits and humans, a characteristic genre of Tuvan folk literature). Though I cannot prove this at this point of my research, I surmise that reading this literature is a source of creativity for contemporary Tuvan shamans and a credential which legitimises them as such. To mention two more examples: I used to visit the Republic library of Kyzyl with a Tuvan man practising as a shaman, who would recommend books to read on shamanism. Maadyr (whom we met in the previous case study) was also a regular reader of Tuvan folk literature, while I remember him reading for long hours a book about shamans exiled in the camps of north Siberia. There is no doubt that Balgan knows about the Tuvan folk

[8] See Vitebsky (2002: 191), about a similar example concerning a Yakut shaman's daughter – and a revivalist shaman herself – who discovered her father's shamanic robe and drum, which the latter had hidden in the forest during the years of Soviet repression.

[9] As he told me, shamans used to be rich and politically powerful during the feudal years, something that Balgan views as a realistic possibility again in the post-Soviet age.

hero; it is possible that the latter has been a model for transformation, which has inspired Balgan.

If this is so, it emerges that at the core of his narrative of repression and revenge there exists Balgan's potential for symbolic transformation, which has been moulded by the pattern of the folk hero. Just as with his money loss and his ex-wife's death, this potential appears after an ordinary misfortune, Soviet repression, which lay Tuvans also suffered. Here also a misfortune provides the onset for a self-transformation; but, more importantly, Balgan consciously ascribes a transformative meaning to this misfortune, taking into account his mention of his grandmother's presentiment and her bestowing to him of her shamanic attributes. We saw that the motif of bestowing precious items to the descendant also appears in some of the heroic epics. The myth of the Tuvan hero resembles Balgan's life-story due to a basic analogy: in both cases there exists a misfortune which provides the impetus for a transition to revenge; the young hero/shaman is given the instruments of revenge, armour for the hero and ritual attire for the shaman. Just like the concept of suzuk (section 3.6), the myth of the hero operates as a "personal symbol" articulating individual experience with cultural tradition, inasmuch as it permits Balgan to relate his experiences of repression to a cultural frame, from which he derives a transformative meaning.

I would like to close this section with a comment on the therapeutic potential of his narrative for Balgan himself. I suggested that Balgan employs this narrative to induce a transformative experience in Anna. The question of whether Balgan draws a cure from performing his narrative for a client is related to another question: in what way did repression entail a psychological trauma for him? Certainly, the killing of his grandparents and the suffering he underwent had an impact on Balgan, just as they would have to anybody else. Yet, as I suggested, Balgan has converted this misfortune into a sign of symbolic transformation by articulating his suffering and projecting it onto a mythic pattern of affliction and revenge. I suggest that the symbolisation of this misfortune has a psychotherapeutic effect on him, since it permits him to organise traumatic experiences in accordance with a mythical pattern which begins from a misfortune and is resolved with the hero's revenge. They key to this process is, I believe, Balgan's identification with the figure of the hero on the basis of the analogies between the two stories. Now, we can draw a connection between the characters involved in this consultation: Anna, Balgan, and possibly the mythic figure operating as an archetype for Balgan's narrative. Balgan attempts to instil in Anna his potential for a transformation,

which was triggered by a misfortune situated in the context of the Soviet repression and structured on the pattern of a cultural genre referring to a precedent epoch, the revolution of the Tuvan folk hero against the oppressive feudal regime[10].

If so, it emerges that three successive epochs are intertwined within the same consultation, which appears to entail a therapeutic effect both for Anna and Balgan: as we saw, Balgan managed to engage Anna into the performance of his narrative by means of "suggesting" to her the transformative meaning of his grandmother's bestowal of her shamanic instruments. On a deeper level, he derives this meaning from a cultural scenario analogous to his misfortunes; the myth of the Tuvan hero "suggests" to him that Soviet repression and the killing of his grandmother were a "rite of passage" toward his transformation into an avenging shaman. Additionally, we note here one more element of Balgan's psychobiography, which reinforces my premise that his becoming a shaman departs from the pattern of shamanic initiation, which prevails in the literature[11]: that is, in contrast to narratives of the candidate's death and rebirth as a shaman, Balgan's initiation involves a shaman-ancestor who dies in her successor's stead, so that the latter become a shaman in turn.

But, more importantly, if the narrative has therapeutic implications for Balgan, it seems that he may need to keep re-enacting it in order to keep healing his own trauma of repression. I did not see Balgan performing his narrative for any other client but Anna; yet it makes sense that its performance presupposes an analogy between shaman and client. If so, why does Balgan perform his narrative in this particular consultation and not in consultations with clients afflicted with equally severe misfortunes, such as Yuri or the woman of case 12 (see Table 1)? I think the answer is that a special analogy emerges between Balgan and Anna, the loss of a beloved person, which leads Balgan to recover his narrative. If this is right, it follows that there exists a discrepancy between a need to employ the narrative for the purpose of self-healing and the rarity of the crucial precondition for the narrative to be performed; I did not observe any other consultation

[10] Of course, we must acknowledge that most text sources of Tuvan epics (such as the one by Grebnev I used for this case study) were written during Soviet times; this means that the myth of the Tuvan hero, on which Balgan might have constructed his narrative of revenge, has been rewritten in accordance with the historical project of Stalinism: from Tsarist (imperial) oppression to emancipation and enlightenment brought by the Revolution and communism. For instance, according to Grebnev, a Soviet scholar, the transformation of the hero into a layman signifies the nation's sympathy for the poor toiler undergoing feudal oppression (1960: 29), something that reflects a reading of Tuvan mythology from the viewpoint of communist ideology. In this sense, the Tuvan hero is recast as a proletarian worker, the latter being a symbol of communism.

[11] See section 3.5.

with a client who had lost a beloved person, so I cannot tell how often Balgan has the opportunity to perform this narrative. In any case, my point here is that Balgan must repeatedly enact his narrative in order to continually heal a trauma of his childhood, which is of a historical nature: it is situated in the context of Soviet repression. In the next case study (section 5.3.4) we will see him re-enacting another element of his symbol-system, his "bio-energy", likewise at two levels: at the phenomenological level, in order to cure the client's health problem; and at a deeper level, to cure an inner conflict of his own, which forms the existential ground of his transformation into a shaman. This will lead us to the revelation of the final – and deepest – level of his shamanic transformation.

Part II

4.5. 2nd session

The second session took place in Anna's house the day after the first session. I arrived at her house a bit later than the hour agreed (08:00 a.m.) and I missed a small part of the discussion between Balgan and Anna. After the session, Balgan told me that their discussion concerned the issue of sending off the soul of Anna's son to the other world. Anna politely welcomed me in her spacious house, which was furnished with high quality furniture and the latest technology of home-appliances, something unusual for the suburb of Kyzyl where she lived. She was decorated with jewels at the neck and wrists and was well dressed. At that time, in the living room Balgan was burning artysh to cleanse the house. He looked at me unsurprised, as if he was expecting me (the previous day I had told him that I would attend this session as well). On a shelf I noticed a photo of a young man of my own age; later, Anna told us that it was her now dead son. Below I relay their dialogue:

Balgan: I can feel the ground coming apart. This is not ordinary land. This house was built on a graveyard. Many years ago, there was a graveyard here. Then, it was destroyed and a *sovkhoz* (Soviet farm) was built on it. The dead boy is still wandering in this house.

[Comment: Balgan said this very slowly, while he was walking in the dark corridor of the house, as if he were sensing something mysterious; the wooden floor was creaking after each step, something that added to the "heavy", dismal mood in Anna's house.]

Anna: The day before yesterday I was lying on this sofa, I closed my eyes, but I did not sleep, and I felt as if my cat jumped on me (pointing to the chest). As soon as I realised that the cat was on me, I saw this plant by the wall swaying. When I got up, my daughter

was standing next to me. I asked her: “Did you see the cat around?” But she had not seen anything.

Balgan: This means your son is still in the house. His father’s misdeeds do not let him go. We must send off his soul.

Balgan prepared artysh for cleansing. At that moment, he turned to me:

Balgan: How did you come here?

Kostas: By taxi.

Balgan: Of course, you are rich (Anna and I laughing lightly).

Kostas: Unfortunately, Greeks are not rich.

Anna (her expression reveals perspicacity): Yesterday, I immediately understood what your nationality is. When Balgan said you came from England, I thought: “He does not look British, but rather Greek or Turk[12]”.

Balgan (speaking slowly, as if he wanted to elicit Anna’s impressions from his treatment in the previous session): Yesterday, after I treated you[13], how did you sleep?

Anna: Alright (*normal’no*, in Russian).

Balgan: Soundly (*krepko*, in Russian).

Anna: Yes, soundly.

Balgan: If you slept soundly, this is good. After my cure people sleep well. If somebody does not sleep after curing, he will have pains all night. If you follow my suggestions, you will recover very soon. Is this right Kostya?

Kostas: Certainly.

Balgan: Kostya knows a lot about curing; he has studied curing close to me; he generally investigates this issue. He specially came to me from Cambridge for this (pause). Did you mention once that your supervisor is Russian? His family migrated from Yakutiya many years ago.

Kostas: No, my impression is that he has some relatives there. But I can’t tell for sure…

Anna: Is he a Yakut?

Kostas: No, he is British; he lives in Cambridge.

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[12] This struck me, since the colour of my hair and skin differ from the typical pattern of dark-skinned Mediterranean people, particularly Greeks and Turks. Both Russians and Tuvans usually identified me as a Russian or even as a Caucasian (Chechnya).

[13] He refers to the removal of doora (section 4.2).

Balgan: His family migrated to England after the Revolution…I forgot his surname.
Kostas (somewhat reluctantly): He is called Vitebsky.

Balgan: You see, this is a Russian surname. He probably married an English woman and took British nationality. We also have people in Tuva, who have a Tuvan father and a Russian mother, but they prefer Russian nationality. We call them *metis* people.

Balgan expelled the ex-husband's curses from the house by means of cleansing and ringing a small bell at the same time. He then cleansed Anna with the candle left over from cleansing Yuri (perhaps Balgan thought that as a Russian Anna is an Orthodox Christian, something that would make the use of the candle compatible with this case also). Next, he tied a shoulder blade from a sheep above the entrance of the main door, to avert an intrusion of curses into the house[14]. After that, he advised Anna as follows: "When your enemy is attacking you, do not get angry with him. Imagine you are peacefully reacting, and this way you lead him away".

Anna: By thought.

Balgan: Yes, even ask forgiveness. If you fire back the evil you get, he will defeat you at the end. You must always respond calmly. This way I quickly defeat my enemies.

Balgan (wearing his attire): I am struck by the fact that priests and lamas do not see the spirits. How can they work like that? They can't see illness and curses. Spitting to expel curses is all they can do.

Kostas: It is very simple. Christians do not tend to talk about curses.

Balgan (in a brash voice): How is that? Curses exist among all people. Do you have an enemy in Greece?

Kostas: Yes, I do.

Balgan: Has this person cursed you?

Kostas: Indeed.

Balgan: Was this person's behaviour toward you proper? No. All people, irrespectively of nationality, have to cope with curses. If there had never been curses, people would never fall sick. People fall sick, because somebody has cursed them. But also, you might get a curse[15] from a graveyard. But mainly you get it from evil people. I expel curses and the client recovers. How is it that Christians do not talk about curses? Magicians in Europe claim that they remove curses all the time. I know this, because I was asked to work in France and Italy, where there is a high demand for curse-removal (pause). After death a

[14] Shoulder blades are also used in this way as protections from evil spirits.
[15] Here Balgan is using the Russian term for "curse", which is "proklyatiye".

person must be sent off to the other world. Then, he can be reborn. The dead is sent off to beautiful places in heaven. Now, your ex-husband will receive back the curses that he sent against you.

Anna: With these misdeeds he led my son to death.

Balgan (to me): What does this mean? He is waging war against her.

Anna: This is war against me and his own daughter.

Balgan: This is why we have to give a response.

Anna: He [the ex-husband] should be taken to the psychiatric clinic (pause). I dreamed of my son.

Balgan: You did? This is good. If you hadn't dreamed of him, this would mean he is still around.

Anna: The last six months he momentarily appeared in my dreams twice. We didn't talk, but sometimes I can hear him calling me.

Balgan: If he appears in your dreams, this means he is on the way to the other world. But if he is still here…

Anna: He can't appear in dreams.

Balgan told Anna that he had to remove the doora that was left in her body. To this, he asked Anna to take off her trousers.

Anna (somewhat awkwardly): Take them off entirely?

Balgan: Yes.

Obviously embarrassed, Anna took off her trousers. Now, she was standing half-naked in the middle of the living room, wearing nothing but her underwear from the waist downwards. Balgan removed doora as he had done with Yuri, by working from her legs upwards. Having accumulated all of it, he rushed outside growling to throw it away. Returning, he sat on his chair looking exhausted, saying that removing a curse feels like lifting a heavy stone.

After this, while Anna had gone to make breakfast, I took the opportunity to elucidate the meaning of her dream.

Kostas: I am not sure if I understood, but you said that if she has dreamed of her son, this means he is already gone to the other world.

Balgan: He only instantly appeared in her dreams. But she hears him calling her (Anna is back). You see what is going on, he is aware of what his father is doing and he does not want to leave his mother. But now he knows that he is free to go, because I protect his mother. He has to be sent off. He will be appearing in dreams.

Anna: And we will communicate in this way.

Balgan: Then everything will be fine. He will be looking at you from there. This is what I do as a shaman. I send off the soul of the dead, so that he will be reborn.

Anna: Ever since we moved to this house, nobody else died apart from my son. From time to time, I hear something like a shriek, but I can't find whence it comes.

Balgan: This means there is a *domovoi*. It is his soul. We have to send him off. If we don't, he will afflict his relatives with disease.

[Comment: The term "domovoi" is a Russian adjective referring to a spiritual entity, which, according to the Russian folk tradition, inhabits a house, offering protection to its members. A domovoi is propitiated with food offerings in order to protect the members of a household (Lena Rockhill, personal communication). Yet, according to this tradition, negligence in propitiating the domovoi may lead the latter to afflict the members of a household with misfortunes; this tallies with the Tuvan notion that negligence in sending off a dead human to the other world by means of a special ritual (which includes various offerings) can be a cause of illness and misfortune for his/her living relatives[16]. It may be that by "domovoi" Balgan refers to a Tuvan notion of the spirit of an ancestor or a relative, which protects but also may afflict his/her relatives with illness, yet he uses the Russian term, because Anna's language is Russian. According to Balgan, ancestral spirits may afflict their relatives with illness in order to take them to the other world].

Anna paid eight hundred rubles, an unusually high fee for cleansing[17] (the increased price has to do with the fact that Balgan cleansed Anna's house; in such cases, the fee is usually a bit more increased). The session ended with the arrangement for sending off the soul. Anna mentioned that she would come to the Association after spending a month in a sanatorium in Altai, and willingly responded to my request for discussing her circumstances. However, our discussion never took place, since, as far as I know, Anna never consulted Balgan again. Taking into account the strategy, which urban and rural clients respectively employ in their selection of shamans, Anna's decision

[16] See section 2.3.
[17] As he later confided to me, Balgan had also noticed her wealth.

makes sense. Anna probably gave priority to the privacy of her circumstances and commissioned a shaman in the provinces to send off her son's soul. In turn, if we look again at Table 1, there are three rural clients (1, 9, 10), all facing sensitive issues, who select to consult a shamanic Association in Kyzyl, where anonymity is better protected. These clients probably wanted to avoid unpleasant complications, such as coming across an acquaintance of theirs in the shamanic Association closest to their region or risking a circulation of rumours about their recourse to a shaman, and resorted to a shaman other than those of their place of origin (cf. Obeyesekere 1976: 5).

Nevertheless, sometimes even the relatively secure anonymity, which a city as Kyzyl can afford, cannot protect from coincidences such as the following one. Some days before I departed from Kyzyl, I came across Anna in the bank (approximately a month after this session took place). She glanced at me, but we did not say a word to each other. For a couple of minutes, we found ourselves sitting next to each other (these moments were quite difficult for me, probably for her as well). I preferred not to disturb her.

4.6. Overturning the pattern of revenge: the deeper cause of Anna's misfortunes

Any attempt to analyse the above session under an all-inclusive concept cannot be but futile. This is because, in contrast to the first session, Balgan does not expound on a single theme (e.g., revenge), but opens an array of themes, unrelated to each other or even contradictory, by means of which he intends to cultivate different moods and motivations. I present these themes in the order they appear in the session. First, he reveals something suggestive of an additional cause of Anna's misfortunes, the graveyard under her house. As to the meaning of this revelation, I hazard – making an imaginative leap into Balgan's mind – that he intends to communicate to Anna that her misfortunes were inevitable; that is, they were brought about by the cooperation of two causes, the ex-husband's curses and the graveyard, a process similar to the Zande concept of "additive causation" behind a misfortune, according to which two causes – a natural and a magical one – bring about the same misfortune. To relay a famous example from Zande ethnography, the killing of an animal, which is struck by two spears successively, is attributed to both spears; yet while it is believed that the first spear brought the actual death, the existence of a second spear provides evidence that somebody had practised witchcraft so that game would be killed during the hunt (see Evans-Pritchard 1937: 73-74). Referring to the same example, Swancutt argues that, while additive causal explanations mean that more than one cause is involved in explaining a phenomenon, only one of them is involved in actualising this

phenomenon (2004: 8) – a position I apply to the present case. As I shall suggest below, the ex-husband's curses is an actualisation of pre-ordained misfortune; the latter is expressed through the revelation of the graveyard, a symbol of inevitable misfortune. That is, a specific cause of misfortune, curse affliction, is subsumed under an overarching and impersonal cause of misfortune, the wrath of the dead due to desecrating the graveyard by building a Soviet farm on it. The graveyard overdetermined Anna's misfortunes; it set forth an inevitable process of affliction, which was actualised through the ex-husband's curses and the death of her son.

I would like to dwell a bit upon the revelation of the graveyard, attempting to find out where its symbolic meaning derives from. According to my shaman-informants, a *bazyryk* (tomb) is filled with tremendous amounts of spiritual power or "energy", as they themselves rendered it, which can be used by ritual experts both for good and dark purposes. This energy is the condensation in space of the souls of the dead; it is particularly intense around and within the graves of shamans. Balgan accumulates energy from the grave of his shaman-grandmother several times per year and spends it in treating clients. However, the representation of the graveyard as a space replete with pollution and charged with lethal danger prevails in these descriptions. Thus, before entering a graveyard, a person must be purified to avoid contact with a contagious substance (buzhar) from an ancestral grave. Buzhar can be transmitted from the remains of the dead ancestor to a living person, who dies prematurely of the same cause as the ancestor. Sorcery and cursing rituals performed in a graveyard plague their victims with an acute force by way of invoking the energy of the place. The shaman Maadyr described such a practice: "If you want to take revenge on somebody, you go to a grave of his ancestor. You invoke the ancestor's soul with food offerings and request that the soul attacks its descendant in retribution of the offence you suffered. The soul immediately afflicts the victim". Thus, the idea that the graveyard is a source of danger, which Balgan employs to explain Anna's misfortunes, is embedded in a Tuvan cultural framework. As such, it resonates with similar beliefs about graveyards and graves, found throughout North Asia. To mention two examples from the nomadic Eveny in northeastern Siberia, one must not look back when walking away from a grave, as this signifies attachment to a place, a feeling suitable only for the dead; while, shamans' graves are believed to contain extraordinary power and, according to Vitebsky, exemplify the potential of the dead for acting as agents of protection and danger for the living (see 2005: 322-23 ff.).

Having introduced the graveyard-symbolism to the session, Balgan shifts attention to a number of themes unrelated to each other. Initially, he attempts to alter the dismal sensation deriving from his revelation by involving me in the session. My reaction to his half-facetious remark that I am rich (since I can afford a taxi) reveals my nationality. Here, I must confess that I took Balgan's remark as a signal that he intended to draw me into a performance of alleviating Anna's distress and I submitted myself to his purpose, though not without some unwillingness (due to my commitment to detachment in ethnographic research). In the event, our performative interaction manages to draw – even momentarily – Anna's attention away from her terrible circumstances: she engages in our performance, noting that in the first session she guessed my nationality. Just as in the first session, Balgan manipulates my presence as a theatrical prop, the difference being that here he does so in order to dispel the dismal mood in Anna's house; I am used like an object for relieving distress, to which Anna's attention is deflected. Next, he attempts to instil in Anna belief in recovery by asking her whether she slept well after the treatment. Anna's response does not suggest any improvement, yet Balgan almost imposes to her the proper reaction to his treatment (firm sleep), with which she must be imbued. In doing so, he involves me as a prop once more in order to enhance the legitimacy of his assertion that a good sleep is indispensable for recovery and to claim prestige. But what is exceptional about this is that he even involves my supervisor from Cambridge as a theatrical prop, to whom he now deflects Anna's attention as a means of relieving her from distress. Despite my reluctance to cooperate, Balgan is concerned with my supervisor's biography. Here, I must say that I had told Balgan a few things about Piers Vitebsky's research in Yakutiya after his request to learn about him; to his question why my supervisor has a Russian name I responded with a conjecture: he probably descends from Russia or has relatives in Yakutiya. It seems that, on the basis of this information, Balgan worked a scenario about my supervisor, which revolves around a great historical event, the Russian revolution, and is modelled after a local pattern of intermarriage. In any case, we see a familiar pattern being repeated: Balgan manages to engage Anna in his performance by employing a prop, this time my supervisor.

Next, Balgan cleanses Anna's house; he cleanses Anna by means of a candle – the one that Yuri had brought for his consultation (I will not attempt an analysis of the candle as a symbol here, since it does not seem to have any symbolic significance for Anna; she did not request to be cleansed with a candle). After this, he is doing something enigmatic: he encourages Anna to forgive her ex-husband (I will return to this below). The session is

focused for a while on the theme of curse affliction. We see that Balgan does not jettison the curse as a cause of misfortune (despite his revelation of the graveyard); on the contrary, he reinforces its prominence as an agent of misfortune in two ways: first, by expounding on his visionary experiences of curses (and claiming thus prestige on ritual efficacy at the expense of Christian and Buddhist practices, where, according to Balgan, curing does not require the practitioner to visualise the curses); second, by asserting that cursing is a condition intrinsic to humanity, a reaction to my assertion that Christian discourse shuns cursing[18]. Balgan goes on without any prompting to present his theory of misfortune: cursing from evil people is the primary cause of misfortune, but one can also get a curse from a graveyard.

I would like to examine this premise, because it seems to me that in presenting his theory of misfortune Balgan reveals the point where these two categories of misfortune – the curses from evil people and the curses from the graveyard – converge. The common element in both cases is, as Balgan himself renders it, the curse (proklyatiye) – in the form of an agency causing a misfortune to its victim. But, whereas in the former case this agency stems from the malevolent consciousness of a living human, in the latter it appears as an impersonal force, which can pollute somebody after contact with a grave and its human remains. Whereas the former presupposes a tense or hostile relationship between two persons, the latter may be actualised automatically against any person who purposefully or not comes to contact with or violates the space of the dead. The latter ones do not turn themselves against Anna in the same way that her ex-husband does, or better, the target of their revenge is not Anna in particular. Rather, Anna was unfortunate to live in a house built on a graveyard and in this way to become a scapegoat for the Soviet sacrilege of destroying a sacred space. The danger of curse affliction is intrinsic in the graveyard and autonomous; it may take action against anybody, who consciously or not transgresses its boundaries. Anna's case offers an example where these two causes of misfortune – the ex-husband's curses and the curse of the graveyard – are combined: the existence of the latter condition pre-ordained Anna's misfortunes, which were actualised through the ex-husband's curses.

In the meantime, Balgan demonstrates the universality of cursing by involving my own example of interpersonal conflict (see section 1.4). His question of whether my

[18] I must mention that I was having the official Christianity on my mind when I made this assertion. The reader will recall that discourse on sorcery and cursing is a part of Russian folk Christianity (section 3.3).

enemy cursed me – a question, which is more leading or suggestive than interrogative – reveals that his understanding of this conflict is modelled after his clients' accusations of curse affliction. That is, he wrongly states that I am a victim of cursing (in fact, the opposite is the case, since it is my desire to make my enemy suffer through retaliatory sorcery). In any case, I reply affirmatively to this question, complying with his strategy of validating his assertion that curses are universal. In this instance, Balgan's performative acumen is explicitly revealed once more: he demonstrates the pervasiveness of cursing in the current world, by showing to Anna that even his apprentice, a foreign researcher, fell victim to cursing in another country! His imaginative capacity and self-confidence are unequalled: he demolishes my authority in as masterly a way as he constructed it in the beginning of this session, by creating an image of me as a poor and fatalistic person, who devoted himself to the study of the very same condition he suffers from, a pathetic creature in need of a protective "father figure", Balgan himself. Moreover, the fact that I am under his patronage, which is actually what my apprenticeship is all about, allows him to claim prestige and efficacy. Finally, he reinforces his assertion of the universality of cursing by revealing that he has had offers to work in Europe, where, as he claimed, there is a great need for curse-removals; and, he typically affirms that he will return the curses to the enemy, as he used to do in all the consultations concerned with curse affliction.

In the process, Anna unexpectedly reveals that she dreamed of her son twice over the past six months, something that Balgan takes as an indication that the dead boy is starting to move to the other world. Still, this does not negate the necessity of ritually sending him off (see below). Next, Balgan tells Anna that he has to remove the doora from her body and asks her to take off her pants; Anna does so, though with obvious embarrassment. Her reaction is understandable, if we bear in mind that Balgan's technique of removing doora involves physical contact with the client's body. Certainly, Yuri's treatment also involved physical contact, but the fact that the client here is female grants a particular sensitivity to the cure. In the next case (section 5.3.1) we will see a blatant example of such a contact involving Balgan and a female client, a young Tuvan woman, for "curative" purposes; I will suggest that this "cure" is but a metaphor for giving some pleasure to a sexually frustrated client as well as relieving her tension and reawakening her potential for courtship, something that will make sense after we learn about her failed relationship. By contrast, there seems to be no such meaning in Anna's cure; the information she gave at the beginning of the previous session does not contain

any indication of erotic frustration, and furthermore she is entangled with a preoccupation of a different nature: establishing communication with her dead son.

My presence here is once more catalytic, since my questions about Anna's dreams offer to Balgan the chance to elucidate their meaning. In doing so, he does not address me, but Anna, to whom she explains why her dead son refuses to leave her: he protects her from his father's curses. In this sense, my inquiry is catalytic for another one reason: it permits Balgan to obtain full command of the interaction between all of us – the contact between Anna and her son, and my interest in her dreams – by becoming a surrogate for the protective dead. We saw Balgan constructing a self-image as a "father-figure" over me by means of exposing my vulnerability to curses; now he also embraces Anna under his protective shield, assuring her that her son can freely go, since he knows that Balgan will protect her. This way he establishes his protective role in relation to two different persons, Anna and me, who are nevertheless united through a mutual experience of curse affliction and a need for patronage (as Balgan sees it). In his protective identity Balgan fills a missing role in Anna's family, that of the husband and father, a role that the dead son took over until Balgan's mediation. Within this nexus of interaction between Balgan, Anna and me, an interaction through which Balgan's self-image as a protector is established, genuine concern for Anna and manipulation of her vulnerability merge into one: Balgan engages in a performance in order to gain Anna's trust (and an income) and instil security and confidence in her; yet this performance is motivated (and legitimated as an authentic one) by his experiences of the dead person's presence in Anna's house.

Thus, Balgan discerns ambivalence in the feelings of the dead person toward his mother: her dead son protects her, but he might afflict her with illness, unless he is sent off. Of course, the idea of being afflicted with illness by the spirit of a dead relative who has not been sent off, is embedded in the Tuvan context; the shaman Maadyr told us that this can happen due to negligence in giving the dead a psychopomp ritual (section 2.3). Balgan invokes this idea to account for the relation between Anna and her dead son. Yet I cannot but supplement this cultural explanation with a psychological (motivational) one on the basis of the relation between Balgan and the spirit of his grandmother, the shaman Kara-Kys: I wonder whether the ambivalence Balgan discerns in the mood of the dead person reflects an inner ambivalence pervading his relation with Kara-Kys. The latter protects him and also sustains him as a shaman, by offering to her successor her curing energy from her grave. But, as I shall suggest (section 6.1), she might afflict him with fits as reprisals for his thoughts of renouncing the shamanic vocation. The analogy is explicit:

just as the layman is afflicted with illness for showing disrespect for an ancestral lay spirit, the shaman is afflicted with fits due to thoughts of reneging his vow to an ancestral shamanic spirit. The shaman's suffering is an intensified form of the layman's illness.

However this may be, I conjecture that the cultural idea Balgan employs for Anna has a personal meaning for him: it reflects his ambivalent relation with Kara-Kys, a sustaining but also threatening "mother-figure" for him. If so, it appears that Balgan is not the ultimate master of this session (just as he is not the ultimate master of his hereditary shamanic vocation): his protective agency gives sway to the domineering Kara-Kys, a "mother-figure" for Balgan who watches over him and directs him[19]. In treating Anna and her dead son, Balgan is perhaps working out his own anxieties and fears deriving from the ambivalent relation with a parental figure; a person who nourished him as a child, sacrificed herself so that he would continue the tradition and now sustains him with energy from her grave, but also threatens him with fits each time he plays with the thought of shedding his hereditary shamanic faculty.

Now, I would like to return to the initial theme of this session, the revelation of the graveyard, and explore its implications for the emergence of a feature peculiar to this session, Balgan's plea to Anna to forgive her ex-husband. I should note that, though this plea seems to be generally absent from Balgan's ritual practice[20], forgiveness as an attitude is part of his personality; we saw him forgiving his unreliable friends[21] (though this did not save them from the retaliatory force which is intrinsic in his first name and acts independently of his will). Unfortunately, I neglected to ask Balgan about his urge for forgiveness soon after this session was over, as I should have done; I brought forward this issue a couple of weeks later, while reviewing my notes about Anna's case, but Balgan claimed he could not remember his reference to forgiveness. Therefore, any explanation of why he advised Anna to forgive her ex-husband cannot be but tentative. Yet the pattern of "additive causation", which – as I suggested – operates behind Anna's misfortunes, might provide a hint regarding Balgan's unusual plea: as I shall conjecture below, the fact that Anna's misfortunes were preordained by the agency of the graveyard under her house renders meaningless the continuation of Anna's conflict with her ex-husband. In this sense, an emphasis on retaliation would amount to a brash challenge against the souls of the dead residing in the graveyard.

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[19] See section 1.5.

[20] I am referring to Balgan's interactions with his clients. Apart from the session with Anna, I did not see Balgan urging any other client to forgive his/her enemy.

I will start with focusing on Balgan's performance, with which he introduces this new and deeper cause of Anna's misfortunes. It appears that Balgan initiates this session in the same fashion as the previous one: by creating sensations of severe anxiety, or even horror, which emerge from alarming representations of dismay: the ground coming apart, the graveyard under the house and the dead son wandering in the house. His performative acumen is revealed in this instance also: he manipulates a natural phenomenon, the creaks produced by the wooden floor, in order to invest his revelation with an aura of vividness. Balgan cultivates anxiety by weaving his subjective experience of the dead person's presence in Anna's house with an objective fact, the creaks, enlivening thus his revelation and rendering it experientially real. We can imagine what a sharp appeal this performance would make to a woman mourning for her son's death.

Following his revelation of the graveyard, Balgan sets forth the anxiety-inducing matter, saying that the dead boy is walking in the house, another one flagrant – and perhaps even more disturbing – image of death and morbidity. The situation in Anna's house is pathological; she herself implies this, when at the end of this session she laments the death of her son, an event that, as she says, occurred after they moved into this house. In any case, Balgan's performance of anxiety elicits a reaction in Anna: she responds to his revelation about the graveyard and her son with another revelation, an extraordinary experience she had the day before this session, which Balgan interprets as an indication of the dead boy's presence in the house; that is, he manipulates Anna's experience as a validation of his own experience. Balgan and Anna together construct an intersubjective consensus based on similar experiences of an uncanny presence in Anna's house.

Thus, since the first moments of this session, the symbolism of the graveyard is exposed on stage and is granted the authority to circumscribe the constraints of shamanic practice as a free-floating signifier of preordained misfortune. The aim of this symbolic expression cannot be other than to make Anna realise the grave situation she is involved in. Such a message is best communicated to Anna through an image suggestive of inevitable misfortune.

Within this context Balgan does something enigmatic: he attempts to persuade Anna not to fire back the ex-husband's curses but to forgive him, subverting this way a vital component of his symbol-system, retaliation! In this sense, this consultation is exceptional, since it contradicts the retaliatory element which appeared in Yuri's case.

[21] See his narrative (section 1.6).

Balgan goes so far as to assert that he defeats his enemies by forgiving them, something that is probably a "theatrical" performance; we saw that, even though he forgave his friends for having deceived him, the ability for punishment embedded in his first name afflicted them (section 1.6). The data is insufficient to explain why Balgan advises Anna to forgive her enemy. I wonder whether this stance is conditioned by the inevitability of misfortune, symbolised by the graveyard. The rationale for this stance is that blame for misfortune cannot be entirely placed on the ex-husband's curses, inasmuch as the latter event was an actualisation of a deeper condition, even more powerful than the agency of a shaman as powerful as Balgan: that is, the wrath of the Tuvan dead due to the sacrilege of destroying their domicile in order to construct a Soviet farm.

The above discussion of the graveyard as the deeper cause of Anna's misfortunes introduced the notion of inevitability in the actualisation of affliction. The realisation that Anna's misfortunes were pre-ordained by the graveyard relocates the focus away from malevolent human agency to re-establishing contact between Anna and her son; for this to be achieved, his soul has to be sent off. Revenge is overshadowed by the request to Anna to forgive her ex-husband (though Balgan does not omit to repeat in this session as well his standard assertion that he will punish the enemy; Anna wants to have her ex-husband punished). Accordingly, shamanic action is limited to a series of curing and defensive measures: first, removing doora from Anna and expelling the curses from her house (these acts are not retaliatory, since to return a curse to its sender requires kamlaniye, something that Balgan did not perform in this case); second, the tying of a shoulder blade to the entrance of her house as a means of deflecting curses. After these measures have been applied, the session is focused on the necessity of sending off the dead son, lest he afflict Anna with an illness. This session is for Balgan an exception to the rule, since punishment as an emblematic feature of his ritual practice is suppressed in favour of forgiveness. I suggest that this overturn is conditioned by his revelation of the graveyard, which signifies that Anna's misfortunes originate in an impersonal force, the wrath of the dead, who are pressurised under the remains of the Soviet system; and also by his shifting the focus of the proceedings to sending off her dead son, something that requires a mood of resolution rather than revenge. In this context, ritual retaliation against Anna's ex-husband would probably instigate the wrath of the dead, something that would bring about a new cycle of misfortune and unhappiness for Anna.

4.7. Conclusion

In this case study the origins as well as the constraints of Balgan's retaliatory faculty were revealed. The potential for retaliation, which he inherited from his shaman-grandmother, appeared after the Soviet repression he underwent; in the first session with Anna, he expounds on this faculty by means of his narrative of revenge against the Soviet authorities as well as against his friends (who deceived him). Yet in the second session the revelation of a graveyard under Anna's house, by means of which Balgan possibly intends to convey to Anna that her misfortunes were inevitable, does not permit the actualisation of his retaliatory faculty through kamlaniye. Thus, two different patterns of shamanic retaliation emerge: in the first, Balgan's name takes revenge on his friends independently of his consciousness; in the second, taking revenge on behalf of a client is mediated by ritual action (kamlaniye). Balgan's retaliatory faculty is actualised against curse affliction as an expression of malevolent human agency, yet in Anna's case it stops before an impersonal force, the wrath of the dead due to the desecration of their space by the Soviets. In my view, this force is actualised through the ex-husband's curses, which made Anna ill and killed her son; yet, unlike the other cases of curse affliction in Table 1, the return of curses to Anna's ex-husband is impeded by the realisation that her misfortunes result from a deeper condition of inevitability, symbolised by the graveyard. Anna's case shows that human agency can still be overdetermined by the curse of the graveyard, that is, by a pre-Soviet pattern of spirit-affliction.

Chapter 5. Shamanic psychobiography unfolded: the conflict of the Ancestors

3rd case study: *Arzhana's "paranoid" suspiciousness*

5.1. Introductory note

I present information on the client's misfortune in the process (I have briefly introduced this case study on p. 65 and discussed one of its particular features, antipathy and its canalisation through shamanic cursing; section 2.6). Exposition of the data and of discussions follows the order of the ethnographic events, as they were revealed to me. The reader will review the material in a linear process, starting with the client's misfortunes, moving to various themes emerging from her interactions with Balgan, and concluding with an analysis of her thoughts about an incident, which she will perceive as a premeditated curse-attack against her; I include a chronicle of the events related to this incident (Table 2, p. 140). The chronicle presents the events surrounding curse affliction, as they historically occurred.

In section 5.2 I present the procedure of the consultation and establish information about the client's misfortune, which will be taken up in the course of the exposition; we will see Balgan and the female shaman Oyumaa in a fascinating performance, which will unravel the agents involved in the incident of curse affliction (an additional agent will be identified and her involvement in the client's misfortunes will be elucidated after my own attempts in reconstituting the events of this curse affliction; section 5.4). In addition, two diagrams representing a collision between the forces of cursing and Balgan's bio-energy within the client's body, which Oyumaa will draw in a trance, will constitute the prelude to a major theme of this case study: the cultural representation of the body as penetrable by opposite forces. The following four sections (5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, 5.3.4) are included under note 5.3 and correspond to the four curing sessions I observed. Focusing on a crucial feature of the first three sessions, the client's (bodily and psychological) reactions to Balgan's bio-energy, I will formulate a model of the Tuvan person, based on what I identify as a cultural notion that the body is a vessel filled with healthy or destructive forces. As I will show, central to this model is the idea that antithetical forces (bio-energy versus doora) exclude one another and, therefore, cannot coexist within the same body, a polarity that pervades the shamanic imagery of curing. Section 5.3.4 can be read independently of the cluster of the curing sessions, as the focus is on Balgan's reflections on his shamanic descent; his narrative will give us to realise that his hereditary-heavenly

line of descent (from Kara-Kys) whereby he represents himself as a shaman[1], coexists with an older shamanic line, two contrasting tendencies which compete within Balgan (I will take up this issue in section 6.1). The case study is concluded with an immersion into the characteristics of the client's "paranoid suspiciousness" of curse affliction (5.4): on the basis of the client's narrative of her experiences of curse affliction at her workplace, I argue that ambiguity in the determination of intention behind observable facts intensifies suspiciousness; accordingly, I identify gossip as a practice which sustains and reproduces suspiciousness and tension. At the end of section 5.4 I focus on the specificity of this curse affliction, showing that the curses create an analogy between enemy and victim: they activate a process of horrible transformation within the latter who finally becomes a mirror of his enemy.

I used a tape-recorder in all the sessions; in session 5.2 I used it only in order to record Balgan's ritual recitations and his algysh during his performance of kamlaniye. I translated parts of the dialogues between Balgan and client in sessions 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.3, where the spoken language was Tuvan, with the help of my interpreter, by listening from the tape. In addition, the latter translated (from Tuvan to English) Balgan's algysh in a dagylga ritual he performed at Arzhana's request several months after her treatment at the Association (see Appendix 1). I tape-recorded also her account of the incident of curse affliction (session 5.4), which she imparted to me in one of the subsequent meetings I had with her (we always conversed in Russian).

[1] See section 1.5.

Table 2. The chronicle of curse affliction

1972: Arzhana is born in the village of Seserlig.

1995: She is taken to the hospital with pains in her belly. The diagnosis is inflammation in the left tube of the uterus.

[**1994**-**2001**]: She works as an accountant in the district of Tozhu.

2001: She is transferred to the Dept. of Accounts in the town of Ak-Dovurak. There, she is working under the oppressive administrator of this Dept., a middle-aged (ethnic Tuvan) woman. In Ak-Dovurak, Arzhana has an affair with a man.

March 2002 (**incident of cursing**): The employer offers a cup of black tea to Arzhana; a few minutes after this, the employer receives an Armenian (gypsy) woman in her office. Arzhana is suspicious of the Armenian's presence and of the employer's offer, and perceives this as a plan of curse-attack against her.

September 2002: her health problem relapses; Arzhana is diagnosed in the hospital as suffering from permanent infertility.

- A few days later, a crisis in her interaction with her employer leads Arzhana to resign from her position. She applies for a position in another service, but she is rejected.

October 2002: Her partner reveals to her that he has a mistress who is expecting his child. Their affair is continued, as her partner does not want to leave Arzhana.

February 2003: The partner's mistress gives birth; he abandons Arzhana to leave with his mistress.

1st March 2003: Arzhana consults Balgan in his Association. Balgan divines that her misfortunes result from curses, which various shamans cast against her at the employer's request. He also divines that the Armenian woman has cursed Arzhana and makes a hint about a Buryat woman (presumably implicated in Arzhana's misfortunes).

- Balgan confides to me that the Buryat woman targeted Arzhana's position; she intended to cause Arzhana to resign, in order to place an unemployed relative of hers in Arzhana's stead. To this goal, she commissioned the Armenian witch to curse Arzhana.

11th March 2003: In my meeting with Arzhana I relay to her Balgan's revelation about the conspiracy between the Buryat and the Armenian; she expresses disbelief and relays the episode in her workplace, involving the Armenian and a cup of tea (see March 2002, above). Arzhana is adamant that the Armenian cursed her at the employer's request.

- A few weeks later, Arzhana mentions that she has heard of an old Buryat woman living in Ak-Dovurak, who is rumoured to be dealing with black magic. She also mentions that she heard of an Armenian witch practising in Kyzyl and wonders whether it was she who came to the Dept. of Accounts, specially commissioned to curse her.

5.2. Cleansing from the curses

In the afternoon of the 1st March, two women entered in the Association and approached the cashier's office, where Lydia[2] was sitting. They told her they wanted to consult Balgan. Lydia asked them to sit on the bench and wait, since Balgan was treating a client at that moment. I was standing by the stove (next to the bench where the women were sitting), trying to keep myself warm and find some relief from a terrible cold. The two women smiled at me rather bewildered (they had probably realised that my presence at the Association was special); I asked them what the reason of their visit was to receive the following response from the younger of them: "*Po lichnomu voprosu*"[3]. At that time, Balgan, who had just finished the treatment, asked the two women to enter in the main consultation room. The women sat on the bench next to Balgan's desk. I sat on the opposite bench, facing the women. The female shaman Oyumaa was sitting behind the small desk next to Balgan's, having a notebook and a pen on it. Balgan asked the clients: "*Chunuu aiytyryp turar*?"[4]. The older woman started speaking on behalf of the younger one, who proved to be her daughter. According to her mother, the daughter had recently lost her job in the town of Ak-Dovurak, where she lived, and she was facing a serious problem pertaining to her generative organs (as far as I was able to understand at that moment). What was worse, her partner had abandoned her for another woman. Thus, she had successively lost her job, her health and her partner. The woman contended that her daughter's ex-employer had caused these problems by commissioning shamans to curse her daughter. Balgan asked the young woman where she had been born and lived until that time.

At this point, I think it is necessary to introduce to the reader the main character of this case study: this is *Arzhana*[5], a calm and sympathetic young woman, who, as she will claim below, became a target of her employer's antipathy, canalised through cursing and bullying treatment. Below, I quote a part of her autobiographical narrative taken from

[2] This is Balgan's second wife, the cashier of the Association.
[3] "For a private matter" (in Russian).
[4] "What do you want to ask about?" (in Tuvan). I must mention that for the most part of this session Balgan and the clients conversed in Russian, something that made the task of keeping notes a lot easier. I avoided using my tape-recorder in this session; I took the younger woman's resistance to replying to my question about her problem before this session as a sign that she would not approve the use of recorder.
[5] My informant asked me not to reveal her real name. Apart from the general reason of anonymity, she was afraid that, if her real name were kept in my writings about her case, her ex-employer would potentially find out that she consulted a shaman and would curse her again. Therefore, we agreed that I would change her real name for the purposes of this thesis and of any other (published or not) essay. The name Arzhana, which we agreed upon after my own suggestion, derives from the native term "arzhan", which refers to the

our independent meeting which took place eleven days after this consultation (I compared this narrative with my notes from her narrative in the consultation as well as with what Balgan could remember of her narrative, and I am confident that she told both of us the same story):

I was born in 1972 in the village of Seserlig, located close to Kyzyl. I am the youngest child in my family (Arzhana has three brothers). I spent the first years of my life changing places with my family (her father was working as a vet and he was being transferred to collective farms in different regions of the Republic). After school, I studied accountancy in the agricultural college in Kyzyl. I found a job as a tax consultant in Tozhu district, where I lived for 7 years. Everything was fine, until I was transferred to the town of Ak-Dovurak two years ago. I was working in the Department of Accounts, where I had to co-operate with the Head of the Department on a daily basis. From the first days of my presence there, she showed that she would not let me do my job in peace. She was challenging me all the time and accusing me of incompetence and sloth. Of course, I could not react, as she was superior. But the true reason behind all these was that she was envying me[6]. For this reason, she used to invite shamans in her office to curse me. Things were going like that for more than a year, until I resigned last September. I could not put up with her any longer.

As regards my health problem, in 95 I was taken to the hospital with terrible pains in the area of my belly. The doctors diagnosed a kind of inflammation in the right tube of the uterus and they told me I should go into surgery. However, I did not want to have any operation at that time. I took medication instead, but it was to no avail. Ever since, I have been to the hospital a couple of times, just to be examined. Last September my condition relapsed and I went to the centre of diagnostics. When I told the doctors about the surgery, they told me that my condition was so bad and that there was nothing they could do. They also told me that there was no chance to have children.

Thus, in the course of September 2002, Arzhana left her job, her impaired health relapsed, and she learnt that she would be permanently sterile. But the final blow was still to come:

While living in Ak-Dovurak, I was having a relationship with a man. Last October (a month after leaving her job) he revealed to me that he was involved in an affair. He and his mistress were teachers. That woman was pregnant by him. I told him to leave me and go to her, if he wanted, but he refused. He told me that he was trying to forget about her and that he wanted to live with me. But, when in February his mistress gave birth, he changed his mind. Not only I did not protest, but I also gave him money to start his life anew. Now I regret this. Shamans say that people should not give money away, because their happiness is slipping away from their hands. When their child was born, they invited me to their house. I accepted the invitation, but, as soon as I got there, I realised that their purpose was to humiliate me. When they received me, they did not offer to me anything. Usually, when we have a visitor we offer tea, as you did, something

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natural water-springs, known among Tuvans for their healing properties. I decided to call her Arzhana, because this is one of the most characteristic female names in Tuva. Place-names have also been changed.

[6] See her narrative in section 5.4.

that is pleasant. But, more than this, they assured me that their life was much better than before. I haven't had any relation with them ever since.

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Balgan performed divination with stones to find out the cause of her misfortunes – as we saw, the women knew the cause even before the consultation. The outcome of the divination confirmed their conviction that the employer had commissioned shamans to curse Arzhana. As evidence of this, Balgan pointed to two white stones (representing the two women), which were surrounded by many black stones (representing the numerous curse-attacks, which had afflicted Arzhana during the last two years)[7]. Next, he asked Arzhana to write on a paper the ex-employer's full name. She did so and left the paper to Balgan's desk. Balgan glimpsed at the paper and passed it to Oyumaa, asking her what she thought of that. Her reaction was characteristically striking (not only for me, but for Arzhana also) and somewhat unusual for a shaman: Oyumaa glanced at the name and left the paper on the desk distraught, exclaiming: '*Gospodi, strashno*!' ('My God, it's terrible!', in Russian)[8].

Balgan took the paper and fixed his eyes on the name. I did not realise that he was visualising the events of cursing in the Dept. of Accounts before he recounted some incidents of cursing. Balgan mentioned that he "saw" shamans cursing Arzhana in her workplace at the employer's request. In addition, he "saw" an Armenian witch, a gypsy woman, who cursed Arzhana in the same place; also, he "saw" a Buryat woman[9]. Balgan told Arzhana that her ex-employer had enlisted shamans, who "attacked you with terrible curses (kargysh) to lead you to death". He concluded that "your way is closed; I have to cleanse you from the curses and open the way ahead of you". I observed '*kezhik chok*' ('no luck', an expression which Balgan often used in consultations with curse-afflicted clients). Balgan agreed and introduced me to the women as an academic from England, apprenticing as a shaman. They nodded to me in a way denoting typical politeness, but also an urgency of returning to the consultation-process.

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[7] Balgan performed the "random" pattern of divination (see section 2.2).

[8] Balgan, whom I asked about Oyumaa's reaction to the name after this session was over, told me that her reaction was due to the fact that she was inexperienced as a shaman and, therefore, unaccustomed to the view of incidents of shamanic cursing (which the employer's name on the paper revealed). Nonetheless, Oyumaa had independently treated a considerable number of clients as part of her formal training at the Association.

[9] At that moment, Balgan did not say anything about the involvement of the Buryat woman in Arzhana's misfortunes. He will do so in section 5.4.

Ritual action began. Balgan burned incense (artysh) to purify the women. At the same time, he was saying: "Now that evil woman is trying to attack you again (pause); you can't defeat me, nor you can frighten me (addressing the evil woman). I'm preparing myself with composure and I will send the curses back to her just like a missile". He cleansed Arzhana and her mother successively, bringing the branch of juniper in three circles around their bodies. During the cleansings, he pronounced the following ritual recitation, called "*artyzhap turar*"[10]:

Oi, oi (invocation of the spirits) *artyzhadym, artyzhadym*
I have purified, I have purified

Artysh-bile artyzhadym
I have purified with juniper

Artysh-bile aza-chetker arly berdi
With juniper aza-chetker (evil spirits) are gone away

Aaryg-aarzhyk, aas dyldar
Illness and evil words

Azhyyp kirip chorui bardy
They are gone away

Amydyral-churtalgazy aryg chorzun
Make life be pure

Balgan tied a blue thread to Arzhana's right wrist and a red one to her left wrist as a protection (sagyyzyn) against curses. One part of the blue thread was tied to the effigy as a symbol of his eeren, which Balgan had inherited from his grandmother and hung on the wall above his chair[11]. Hundreds of threads from previous clients were hanging from the old and worn effigy, a powerful demonstration of Balgan's experience as a practising shaman. So, Arzhana was now connected with Balgan's eeren through the thread and was receiving its protection. The thread was then cut with a scissors in the middle and a part of it remained tied to the effigy. Balgan cut the rest of it up to the client's wrist and threw it on the ground by the stove, spitting on it. According to him, doora is concentrated in this part of the thread, which is discarded. A part of the red thread was tied to the effigy and another one was discarded in the same procedure as above. (The reader will recall from the session with Yuri that the blue thread stands as a symbol of the cleansing force

[10] This is actually a verb form, which means "to cleanse".

of spring-water, arzhan, while the red thread symbolises happiness). During this process, Balgan pronounced the following recitation, called "*sagyyzyn kylyrda algysh*" ("Recitation for protection"):

Aza-chetker dyynmazyn
Make aza-chetker (evil spirits) not penetrate

Aaryg-aarzhyg dyynmazyn
Make illness not penetrate

Aiyyl-khalap bolbas bolzyn
Make accident not happen

Kargysh-yrgysh dyynmazyn
Make kargysh-yrgysh (curses) not penetrate

Kara-sagysh dyynmazyn
Make evil thought not penetrate

Kara-bo-dal dyynmazyn
Make evil thoughts not penetrate

Azhy-chemi khovei bolzun
Make products (supplies) abundant

Azhy-tolu oncha chorzun
Make children come as a gift[12]

Al bodu oonun ishti kushtug chorzun
Make her and her mother (go) strong

Eerennerim kamgalazym
Make my (shamanic) spirits protect them

Eeleri koor bolzun
Make the spirits watch them

Eki chuveni beerlechin
Make all good things come here

Sagyyzynnar kushtug chorzun
Make this protection strong

[11] See section 1.7.
[12] On the whole, the content of this recitation remains the same, irrespectively of the case dealt with. Minor changes may happen as responses to the client's particular problem. Here, a special line is inserted referring to Arzhana's childlessness. Likewise, the next line has been specially inserted for Arzhana and her mother.

Sagysh yshkash kamgalazyn
Make this protection as good as my thought is for her

Saryg ortemchei ge dirig chorzun
Make them (go) lively in this yellow world[13]

Kamgalalyg kushtug chorzun
Make this protection strong

Karan-kushter dyynmazyn
Make the black (evil) forces not penetrate

[Inaudible] *demir yshkash kushtug chorzun*
Make her strong as steel

The next part of the consultation was kamlaniye, which Balgan performed in order to remove the curses from Arzhana and return them to the ex-employer. In my ethnographic experience, this was an exceptional and complex performance, since, as we will see, Balgan and Oyumaa both grappled with the unseen forces of cursing. Below I have attempted as vivid and detailed a description as possible.

Balgan donned his attire (*kham ton*, in Tuvan) and stood before the women, holding the drum (*düngür*, in Tuvan) with his left hand and the drumstick (*orba*, in Tuvan) with his right. He started beating the drum softly and steadily to catch the right rhythm. The delicate sound of the small bells hanging from the internal, vertical wooden pillars of the drum and the tingling sounds of the numerous tiny metallic pieces covering the obverse of the upper part of the drumstick gently accompanied the monotonous roll of the drum. Balgan was deftly swaying from side to side, keeping his eyes closed, while his face was contorted by his laborious mental effort to call upon the eeleri. The edges of his feathered headdress were touching the light bulb hanging from the ceiling; his right foot was softly tapping on the ground, following the rhythm of the drumbeats. After a while, the sound of the drum grew louder and its rhythm became faster. For the next ten or so minutes, Balgan was summoning the spirits (eeler) of the taigas (*tandynnar*), rivers (*khemner*) and mountains (*daglar*) in a melodious, loud and passionate voice, while his sharp blows on the drum were filling the space with vibrant sounds. The animal-like metallic effigies, as symbols of the eeler, that adorned his brown attire and the metallic embellishments of the drum and the drumstick produced a deafening noise, driven by the incessant rolling of the drum.

[13] It refers to the human world, known as “saryg oran” (“yellow world”) in Tuvan.

The intensity of the performance escalated in the next five minutes. The tempo of the drum grew faster and faster, while Balgan's voice became more excited. Listening to the tape-recording before writing this account, I was overwhelmed by a feeling that this performance could rival the great shamanic séances of the past, as they are masterfully represented in the Soviet literature of Siberian shamanism. (I am aware that this feeling derives from my pre-fieldwork enthusiasm with trance-shamanism). I think that a number of sketches from a famous account of an Evenk shaman's séance to expel the spirit of the disease, an unequalled masterpiece of ethnographic description by the authority on Evenk shamanism, Arkadii Fedorovich Anisimov, could be equally applied to this séance. Thus, "the drum moaned, dying out in peals and rolls in the swift, nervous hands of the shaman", and "Under the hypnotic influence of the shamanistic ecstasy, those present often fell into a state of mystical hallucination, feeling themselves active participants in the shaman's performance" (1963: 101-02).

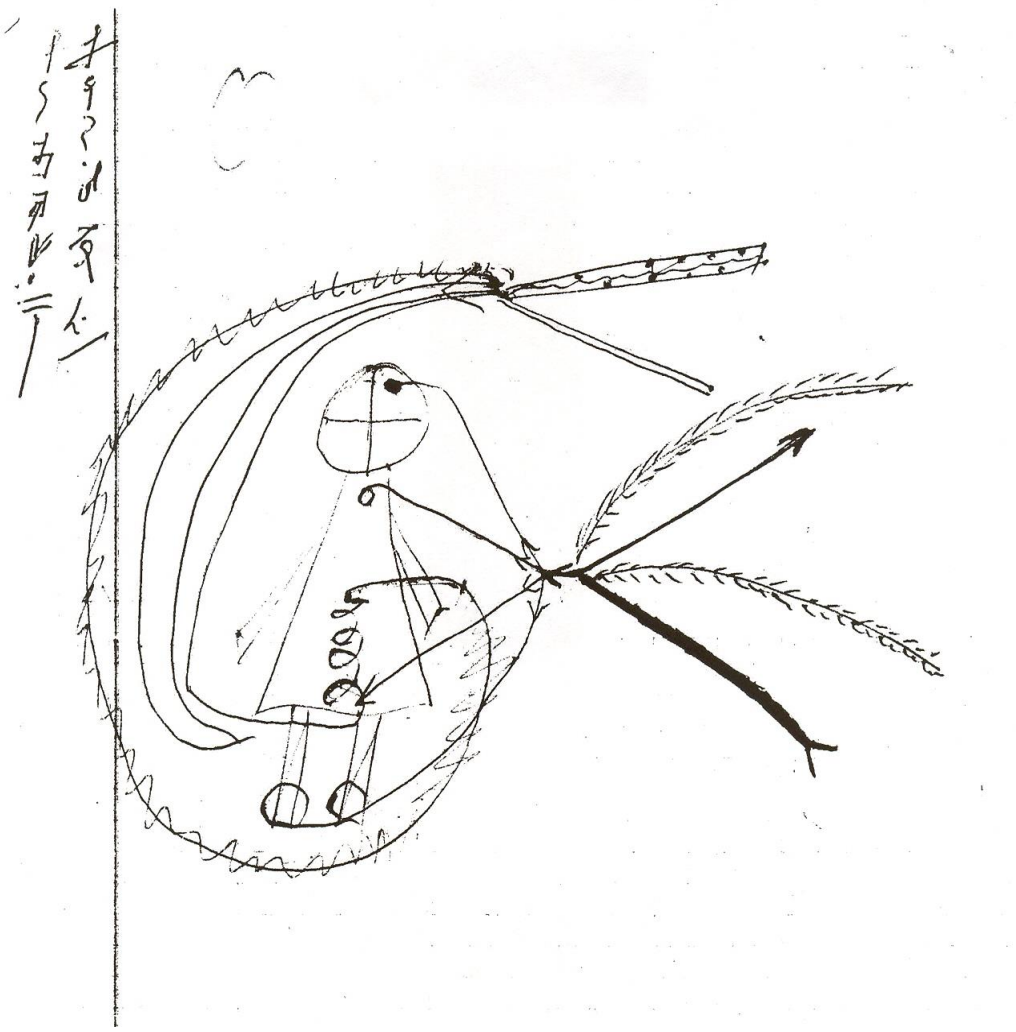
In a similar, I imagine, state of mind, Oyumaa, who by that time was fixing her gaze on the desk motionless, suddenly plunged into a hallucinatory trance: her eyes rolled back with eyelids rapidly blinking, and she thrust herself on the notebook before her, drawing with tremendous swiftness the – invisible for me and the clients – battle between the curses and Balgan's bio-energy, which she visualised. The séance reached a culmination, as Balgan was invoking the spirits under the thunderous sounds of the drum; suddenly, he rushed in the yard and, as I watched him from the window, he threw doora away waving the drumstick (where the doora had been accumulated). On returning, he continued performing for a few more minutes in the same intensity as before; at the peak of his performance, he ceased drumming and instantly brushed several times the front side of Arzhana's body with the upper part of the drumstick. Having removed more doora, Balgan abruptly pulled the drumstick from her body and growled (as a reaction to the exertion caused by contact with doora), while rushing again to dispose it in the yard. Coming in, he resumed his performance, beating the drum at an exceedingly fast tempo and addressing the spirits with long invocations. Oyumaa, who had ceased drawing during the two sequences of doora-removal, on hearing the drumbeats re-entered a trance, as described above, and, after finishing her complicated designs, returned to normal consciousness. The séance ended with Balgan in an even more elevated crescendo of drumbeats, followed by a succession of stretched, almost indignant invocations. The whole event lasted about twenty minutes.

Soon after kamlaniye, Oyumaa explained to the women and to me the meaning of her two drawings[14]. Diagram 1 illustrates the battle against the curses with complicated designs: Arzhana is attacked (from the left side of the picture) by four arrows of curses, which are launched from a source above her head. According to Oyumaa, the arrows have seriously damaged the three first *chakras*[15] (drawn in the area of the belly), causing infertility. She went on saying that if the curses had reached the fifth (final) chakra, death would be inevitable. A second, thick arrow, joined by two feathered lines, is attacking Arzhana from the right side. The arrow is divided into four lines, which are attacking the victim's body: the first is intruding in her under her feet, the second is attacking her in the base of the chakra, the third in the chest, where a ring is depicted, and the fourth in the head, where a dot is depicted. Asking what this dot meant, I received the weird response by Balgan that this was a spider! Another arrow bearing an arrowhead at its upper end is emerging from the point where the four lines of the thick arrow converge. This is a sign that the curses are leaving after the bio-energy, which Balgan passed to Arzhana. In the upper left corner, two vertical scripts mention downwards and from left to right in a mystical – according to Oyumaa – language: "Good is coming, evil is going away". Oyumaa mentioned that the round figure next to these columns represented the sun. Balgan added: "The sun keeps her warm". I was fortunate enough to elicit an experiential comment from Arzhana about the impact of kamlaniye; as she mentioned, she felt as if a weight were leaving her during kamlaniye.

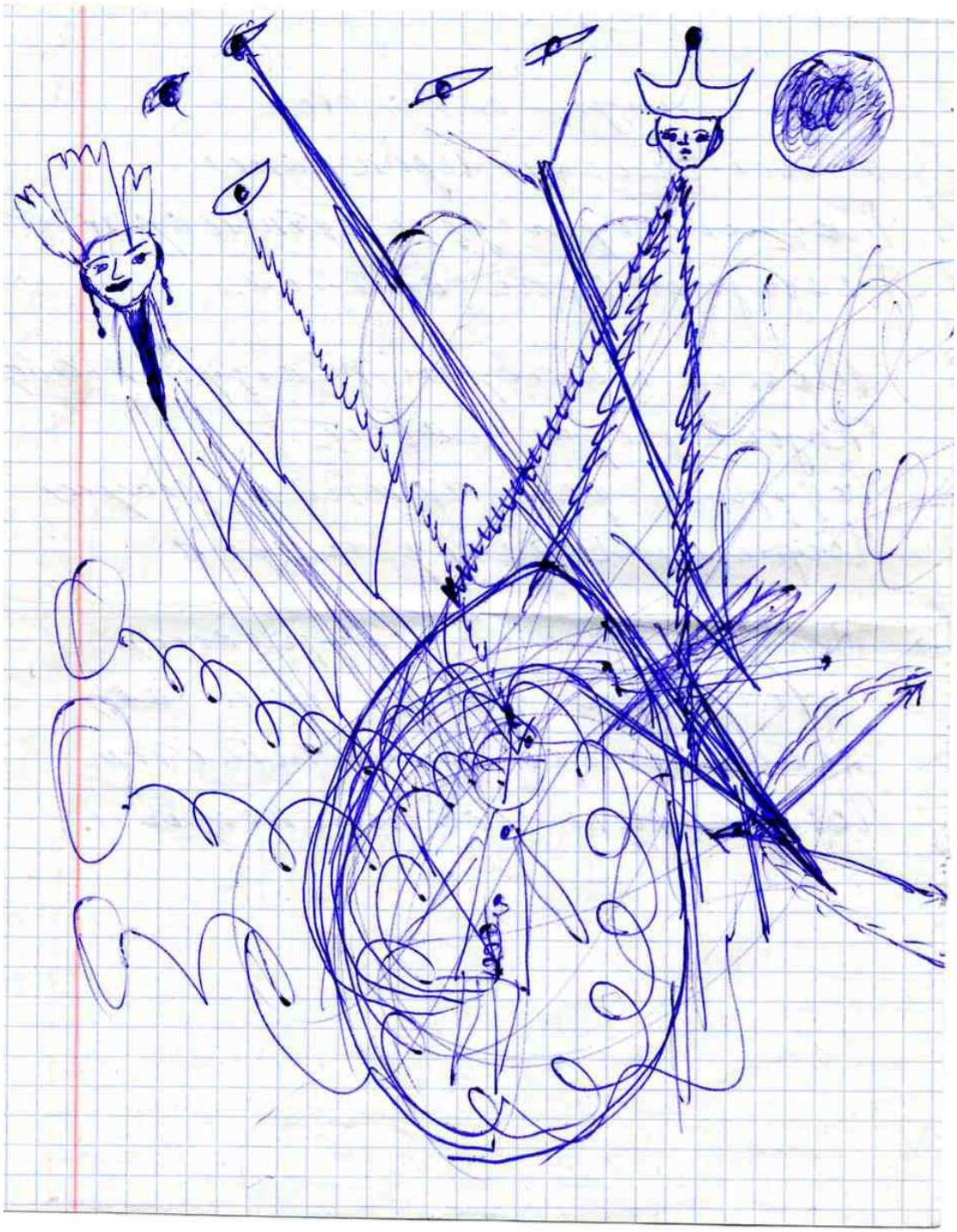
In diagram 2, the work of bio-energy on Arzhana is shown with awesomely flashing designs. Arzhana is enclosed within a protective shield, woven by the massive energy, which is emitted in the form of rays by two human-like figures, an *er-eezi*[16] (right) and a *khereezhen-eezi*[17] (left), as well as by several eyes and many round figures representing eeleri (nature-spirits). The two masters wear traditional headdresses (both of them looking Lamaist). The male figure seems actually to seize the round shield with his two rays, which extend to cover its surface. Balgan described the eeler as the eyes of lightning. The bio-energy is depicted as penetrating the shield and acting upon Arzhana,

[14] The drawings are shown on pp. 150-151.
[15] The term "chakra" derives from Sanskrit and it means "wheel" or "circle". It refers to circles, which are believed to be aligned in an ascending column from the base of the spine to the top of the head within the human body. The chakras are considered as loci of life-energy, which vitalise the body and are associated with cognitive and physiological functions. Originally found in the Vedic texts of Hinduism, the concept of chakra was adapted to Tibetan Buddhism. As mentioned, Oyumaa cultivated an interest in Buddhism (see section 1.8), where she probably discovered the concept of chakra.
[16] This is a male spirit-master, which resides in particular locations in the landscape.
[17] This is the female counterpart to er-eezi.

who is shown with the drawings of chakra and the dots in this diagram also. Two arrows, which extend from the same source on the right side of the shield, symbolise the curses going away. We notice that two eyes next to the male master form a snake-like figure; from its edge extends an arrow which points to the two arrows of the curses (here, I must mention that snakes, which abound in many rivers of Tuva during the summer, are for Tuvans a symbol of fertility and a powerful shamanic spirit-helper; Balgan's attire was decorated with a plastic snake). Next to this figure, two eyes make an invisible face; from the right eye extends a thick arrow, whose huge head sharply rams the arrows of the curses, a vivid illustration of the power Balgan's bio-energy has. Seen together, the arrows emerging from the snake-like figure and the eye look as though they persecute the curses. Beside the thick arrow, a curly line extending from an eye reaches Arzhana's head; many such lines extend also from the round figures. Notably, in both diagrams Arzhana's face repeats the crosspieces of the drum: based on drawings with the same pattern, Piers Vitebsky suggests that this is a representation of face and chest, which is common among Siberian cultures (personal communication). The sun appears in this drawing also, next to the male figure.



Drawing 1. The battle against the curses



Drawing 2. The penetration of bio-energy into Arzhana

Balgan divined once more to find out if the curses had been returned to the ex-employer. However, after he threw on the purple silk-woven mat the forty-one stones kept inside his palms, the pattern of the first khuvaanak appeared again: two white stones surrounded by many black ones (a divinatory result that I expected, since the majority of the stones is black). Balgan concluded that Arzhana had been afflicted with a multitude of curses. In the event, Balgan and the clients agreed that the seriousness of the situation demanded that more than three cleansing/curing sessions take place.

Arzhana left the main consultation room to pick her coat from the reception hall. Thinking that this could be a good opportunity to secure a curse-afflicted informant, I approached her discreetly, saying that I wanted to discuss her case. She responded with a long "*Konieshno*!"[18], and, without waiting for my request, she wrote her phone-number on my notebook, as though she had been flattered by my interest in her. I was puzzled by her prompt response to my hesitant request, which contradicted her resistance to my question about the reason of her visit in the beginning of this session. I felt that there was something hypocritical in this promptness, which made me wonder whether she was really suffering or her account of the envious employer's curses and her medical drama were for her a means of satisfying a narcissistic desire by becoming the focus of interest for a number of persons important to her in different ways, such as her family, her friends and incidentally a young foreign ethnographer (see section 5.3.2).

5.3. The curing sessions

Arzhana attended five cures at the Association, during which Balgan was passing bio-energy to her ailing generative organs by laying his hands on her body. These cures took place successively in the interval between the 2nd and the 8th of March. Yet I must note that these cures represent only a fraction of the workings of Balgan's bio-energy inside Arzhana's body, which were continued between sessions. As we shall see, a consequence of this ongoing cure will be a chain of reactions as acute physical pains and dreams, which Arzhana will undergo; these experiences will be for Balgan a measure of his therapeutic efficacy and will determine the development of his therapeutic strategy.

[18] "*Konieshno*" means "Certainly" in Russian.

5.3.1. 1st curing session – 3 March: the permeability of the body

Before I relay the events of this session, I should note that the session presented below is actually the second, since the first curing session took place on the 2nd of March. Unfortunately, I was not able to attend this session, since my impaired condition – the cold mentioned in the beginning of the cleansing session – which had become aggravated by the morning of the 2nd, did not allow me to go to the Association (I did not manage to collect data on this session, apart from those relayed below).

This time Arzhana turned up on her own, exactly at 9 a.m. In the reception-room, Balgan asked her to sit on the bench in the main consultation room and wait until he was finished with an arrangement of a ritual for a family on the phone. I sat with Arzhana and asked her how she was feeling after the previous day's cure. She replied (in Russian): "*khorosho, normal'no*" ("fine, all right"). Some moments later, Balgan appeared before us. He was standing at the entrance of the consultation room and was staring at me as if something weird were going on. At the same time, he was flickering his fingers in a way, which resembled a magic trick before a sleight of hand. On asking why should the cure take place so early in the morning, I received this reply: "Curing goes well when it is practised in early morning. I keep energy from the night, now it feels like electricity. The good hours for curing are from 12 p.m. until early morning, especially during the night. My grandmother used to shamanize throughout the night. Each time she was invited to cure somebody, she would perform in the tent until dawn". I had no doubt that Balgan was aware of my great interest in events of shamanic curing, which to my disappointment did not happen that often, and that he would seize this opportunity to perform a cure, which would satisfy the observer's interests, convince the client (as well as the observer) of the effectiveness of his curing and, therefore, claim prestige as a great shaman. A powerful way to achieve these aims – especially the latter one – was the conversion of the curing séance into a course in shamanic curing designed for me as his apprentice, whenever this was possible.

Balgan sat behind his desk, and I sat next to him. Arzhana was sitting on the bench. Here, I relay the dialogue between Balgan, Arzhana and me before the curing session:

Balgan (to me): Yesterday, after I treated her, a reaction occurred. I treated her with my hands (laid on her body) and she had a strong pain on the right side of the belly after the session. The day before that (cleansing session), I performed kamlaniye to cleanse her from the curses and she had a pain in the belly afterwards. When this reaction happens,

we use a proverb to describe it, '*deep turgan*' ('to grasp, seize'; here it is used in the past tense). It means that the patient has been seized by pain. This means that the disease is going away. You got it? She had this reaction, which is a sign that her body is reacting to the energy I gave. Last night the pain that she felt moved from her belly to the chest.

Arzhana: Last night I fell asleep, but at night I woke up with a terrible pain in my chest.

Balgan (to me): She had these pains because her body was used to living with the disease. From now on, it has to live without the disease. These pains are signs of progressive recovery. Everything is fine for you now; I have thrown away the curses (to Arzhana). You must relax and forget what you went through.

Arzhana: I had a dream last night. I was walking alone and crying in Ak-Dovurak.

Balgan: Why were you crying?

Arzhana: I don't know, but I kept crying all the time.

Balgan: Now it's all finished. When did you first go to the hospital?

Arzhana: In 1995. I fell very sick and I was taken to the hospital. The doctors diagnosed a kind of inflammation in the right tube of the uterus. They prescribed medication, but it was to no avail.

Balgan: I recommend additional treatment for you. I suggest you buy *list krapivyi*[19] from the pharmacy. It will aid the restoration of the organism. When did you start having this problem?

[Comment: the words alone can in no way give even the slightest impression of the outlook Balgan had during this recommendation. His slow pronunciation and his sharp, unspecified gaze were giving the impression of a seer].

Arzhana: In 1995.

Balgan: So, how old were you when it appeared?

Arzhana: 23.

Balgan: This is a chronic problem (turning to me). How is "chronic illness" called in Tuvan? (asking Arzhana).

Arzhana: *Khoochuraan aaryg*.

Balgan: There it is. Write this down (to me). You need to know this.

[19] Its literal meaning is "leaf of nettle". It is a medicine with general anti-biotic properties.

The curing process

The cure lasted approximately half an hour. First, Balgan purified Arzhana with incensed artysh, bringing it three times around her body. He brought it to the area of her belly and fumigated under her sweater. He placed the palm of his right hand in different areas of the belly, trying to locate the source of the disease. His search ended in the left part of her belly. Balgan kept there his palm for about a minute to find out how much doora had been accumulated and to pass his bio-energy to the afflicted organs. The transmission of bio-energy stimulated a reaction inside Arzhana's body, as the dialogue between them following shows:

Arzhana: I do not feel very well. I feel a kind of heaviness within my belly.

Balgan: This is the effect of my energy. It is a sign that your organism is reacting to the energy I am giving (pause). Look (to me), doora has entered in the left tube of the uterus; it feels like an antenna.

Balgan laid the palm of his right hand in the centre of Arzhana's belly. He firmly kept his palm on that area, pressing it occasionally. For a few seconds, he sensed both sides of the belly and placed again his palm on the centre of the belly. This process took a couple of minutes. By laying his hand on Arzhana's belly, Balgan sensed which internal parts were heavily afflicted with doora and passed bio-energy to these parts to eliminate doora. Balgan laid his right palm on the centre of her belly and his left palm on the base of her spinal column.

Balgan (to me): Do you notice how my hands are working? I am giving energy from both sides. It attacks the parts of the disease and it is dispersed throughout her body. This is how I send soldiers to fight the disease. How do you feel? (asking Arzhana).

Arzhana: I feel as if there is something boiling and moving inside me.

Balgan: This is the effect of the energy. It hurts because, when the cells die or revive, this causes pain. A reaction is taking place inside you (pause). How does it feel now?

Arzhana (crying out): It hurts badly (pause). It is embarrassing to describe it. It feels as if a liquid is flowing inside me.

Balgan: That's good. Doora is going away.

The curing process went on in this way for a few more minutes, until doora was accumulated in those parts where Balgan had been laying his hands. With an instant

movement, Balgan removed doora with both hands and rushed out growling to dispose it in the yard. The next (and final) part of the cure would impress – not to say, astonish – me. I was sitting on Balgan's chair, facing Arzhana, who was still standing motionless by Balgan's desk, when scenes counterpart to what in western societies is acknowledged as erotic contact were unfolded before my eyes. To my astonishment, Balgan (who had just returned from the yard) asked Arzhana to take off her sweater and bra. She did so, without any sign of embarrassment. Now, she was standing half-naked in front of me (Balgan's desk being between her and me). Balgan came behind her and began massaging her large breasts; this lasted about a minute, during which the sounds of Balgan's hands working deeply on Arzhana's breasts broke our silence. Before finishing, Balgan did not omit to justify this action. In his own words: 'for the restoration of the organism' ('*dlia vosstanovleniya organisma*', in Russian). Next, he asked Arzhana to turn to his side and stroked her breasts (almost tugging them) downwards for about a minute. During both phases of this massage, a smile had appeared on Arzhana's face. I discerned signs of a physiological response to Balgan's massage, as Arzhana's nipples were dilated, something that perhaps revealed feelings of pleasure.

[Comment: I had seen Balgan treating female clients in the area of the chest before, though, unlike this occasion, these treatments did not involve direct physical contact, but manipulation through a ritual instrument (e.g., bear claws), with which Balgan rubbed the chest and the upper parts of the breasts (treatment did not require these clients to take off the bra). The particularity of Arzhana's treatment has to do, I think, with the feature of her narrative concerning her abandonment by her partner for a mistress. In this light, the massage could be the culmination of a "cure", specially designed to stimulate her sexual potential.

Let us review the acts involved in this "cure". Balgan fumigates Arzhana under her sweater in order to cleanse her from the employer's curses (which, as we will see, had blocked the totality of her womanhood); as well as to reawaken, I would suggest, her predisposition to courtship, which is perhaps symbolised by her breasts, a sensitive part of female physiology. Next, he gives energy by means of laying his hands on Arzhana's belly and on the area in the base of her spine; this induces in Arzhana feelings of heaviness and of something boiling and moving insider her, as well as of a liquid flowing inside her. These responses lead me to infer that these acts were intended to revive Arzhana's erotic potential (which perhaps had waned after her failed affair) or, at least,

that they were loaded with a covert erotic meaning under the obvious purpose, curse-removal and treatment for infertility. I felt that all three of us implicitly shared the meaning of this "cure" and the motivation behind it: arousing a woman disheartened by erotic frustration; yet the truth is too embarrassing to be voiced as a justification for these intimate contacts in a way other than a generic – and, therefore, innocuous – statement, such as 'for the restoration of the organism'. One could castigate me of seeing too much sexual symbolism in these acts. My interpretation is not drawn from the psychoanalysis of repression[20], neither do I suggest an analogy between Arzhana and the neurotic female of the Victorian age. This interpretation is ethnographically inadequate, as I did not probe into Balgan's and Arzhana's thoughts about these acts (I had inhibitions in doing so). However, the particularity of this case is enough to justify my inference of a sexual element involved in this cure. The latter is expressed through an indirect reference of bodily restoration, which, additionally, serves to authenticate Balgan's curing practice; in a different context it could be: "trust me, I am a gynaecologist". Moreover, there exists evidence to suggest that Balgan's massage – or a variant of it – was known among old shamans: based on informants' childhood reminiscences, Van Deusen cites two examples of female traditional healers who would enhance women's fertility by a touch in the chest or massaging the belly (2004: 39)].

The curing process ended with Balgan saying:

Before the cure, the tube on the left side was thin and weak. Now, it is becoming wider and stronger with my energy. The cells are reviving and this will make the tube return to its normal dimensions. But the disease is still there; it is dispersed all over your belly. It will take several sessions to completely cure you. This is because your problem is chronic. I will treat you six times, because the disease has been multiplied within you. In the summer, we have to do a dagylga ritual in your birthplace, to ask the spirits of that place to offer you health and protection. What has happened to you is a result of kargysh. It is painful now, because the disease is reacting to the energy I gave. You must also use the antibiotic I recommended. Buy it from the chemist's and bring it with you tomorrow. I will tell you how to take it. Now you must go to sleep.

***

Thus, this session evolves around two issues of critical importance for the cure of Arzhana's infertility. The first is the pain Arzhana experiences as a reaction (deep turgan) to bio-energy, which Balgan interprets as a sign that the disease is leaving her body. I

[20] See: Freud [1915] 1991; Laplanche and Pontalis 1983.

argue that this reaction is an expression of a Tuvan cultural mode of sensory attention to one's physiological processes, when altered by the effects of bio-energy. To mention a similar example, which suggests that this reaction assumes the meaning of restoration to health: on telling to my Tuvan interpreter about Arzhana's reaction, she recalled a similar case about her mother who had visited a healing spring (arzhan) in order to find relief from a persisting pain in her back. After staying in the water for a couple of minutes, she felt a sharp pain in her back, a sign that the disease was leaving. According to this pattern, a cure is accomplished, when a reaction – as an acute, intense pain – has occurred in the body after contact with a healing source, whether water-spring or Balgan's bio-energy. The body constitutes a receptacle for malign and beneficial forces – doora and bio-energy respectively – whose changed balance induces pain as a sign of recovery. A chronic state of physiological impairment, that is, a disease that has become a vital part of the organism – or even an aspect of Arzhana's person (see next section) – is removed and what Balgan in a curing session for another client called "the empty space" is filled with bio-energy. The curing system is based on the imagery of a body penetrable by antithetic external forces: the substitution of doora by bio-energy induces pain, something that is interpreted as a sign of recovery.

The second – and related to the first – issue is Arzhana's dream of crying and walking alone in Ak-Dovurak, which she sees in the night after the first curing session (which I missed). I shall discuss the meaning of her dream in the next two sections, after Balgan explains it. Here I suggest that Arzhana's pain-reaction and her dream correspond to two different levels of response to bio-energy: the levels of symptom and symbol respectively. The dream is a symbolisation of changes happening to her body: during the session, doora is driven out of her body; her dream recaptures this change in the form of Arzhana herself – who had internalised doora as a vital aspect of her person – walking in the streets of Ak-Dovurak, where she used to live (as we shall see, the dream expresses Arzhana's tendency to re-embrace doora). By contrast, her pain moves closer to the level of symptom; that is, it taps directly the physiological disturbance (though it has a cultural meaning of healing effectiveness). In other words, the content of the dream is expressive of an unconscious re-working of Arzhana's pain and of its reproduction in a symbolic form (which nevertheless is moving towards a regressive direction; see below). As such, it belongs to an advanced symbolic order compared to the pain-reaction, which directly taps the symptoms of her health problem. Nonetheless, a symbolic meaning is culturally embedded in this kind of pain-reaction (deep turgan): Balgan explains it as a sign of

healing effectiveness. Experiencing pain in response to bio-energy is a precondition for recovery, something that Arzhana probably knew already and thus expected to occur.

My suggestion that Arzhana's responses to bio-energy (dream and pain) belong to the levels of symbol and symptom respectively draws on Obeyesekere's premise that symbolic formation can occur in various degrees of "remove" (that is, progression) from "deep motivation" (that is, the unconscious psychic origins of the symbol)[21]. Certain symbolic forms progressively move away from – while others are tied in a regressive way to – their psychic origins. According to Obeyesekere, the ecstatic priestesses of Sri Lanka – whose transition from psychological crisis to symbolic transformation I sketched out in section 3.5 – offer an ideal example of progression from deep motivation to the creation of symbolism: prior to becoming a priestess, she suffers terribly due to having betrayed a beloved kinsman (who dies in her absence); her assumption of the priestess's role entails a transformation of a "negativity", the recreation of the dead kinsman as a special type of divinity helping her in her healing practices (1990: 16). Whereas these priestesses (and Balgan in my own material) have created their set of symbols out of psychological crisis, Abdin, an ecstatic priest in Sri Lanka, is compelled to engage in the opposite (regressive) process. That is, instead of effecting a symbolic self-transformation, his ritual practices – tongue cutting and head bashing in his role as a practitioner of counter-sorcery rituals or hanging on hooks in shrines for the god of Kataragama – entail a repetition (but not a transcendence) of his infantile motivations, a tendency towards identification with his mother and a drastic fear of his father (see 1990: 3-14 ff.). Obeyesekere interprets an episode of paralysis his informant, Abdin, had as a symptom of hysteria due to his having desisted from performing ritual penances in honour of the god; according to this, Abdin's symbolic formations regress to the level of symptom "*so that under certain conditions of psychic stress, symbol can revert to symptom and vice versa*" (1990: 10; emphasis mine).

I believe that this last premise describes well enough Arzhana's responses to bio-energy. In a state of psychological tension induced by the experience of bio-energy, she (perhaps unconsciously) undergoes a transition from the level of physiological symptom to the level of symbol, as the latter is displayed through her dream. Pain as a negativity (in the sense that it taps Arzhana's chronic illness) is recreated through a symbolic form, a dream, something that – as we shall see in the next two sections – offers to Balgan the potential for psychological manipulation of this symbolic creation towards a resolution of

Arzhana's conflict. Her dream is a symbolic expression of a conflict between bio-energy and doora taking place inside her body; gradually, a symbolisation of her illness (through dreaming) is being enacted, during which symbolic production prevails over symptomatic manifestations. This is what Arzhana's following reflections on her cure suggest: "In the night after the first curing session I felt a sharp pain in my chest while I was sleeping, and then I had this strange dream of walking in the streets of Ak-Dovurak and crying; but after the third curing session these pains (in her belly and chest) subsided and I kept seeing this dream for several days after the last curing session"[22]. This clearly shows that Arzhana is reverting from symptom to symbol as a response to bio-energy. I can only conjecture whether Arzhana's dream is a particular case of a culturally conditioned motivation for re-enacting (and resolving) traumatic experiences at a symbolic level – a process that is exemplified in Balgan's impetus for symbolic transformation out of misfortune. In any case, despite the transition from symptom to symbol that Arzhana's example exhibits, her dream has a regressive, I would even say compulsive, character. Even though Arzhana resorted to shamanistic cure as a means of progressing away from her traumatic past, her dream as an uncontrollable tendency for regression revolts against Balgan's attempt for effecting a severance between Arzhana and doora. For the time being, Arzhana seems to be locked into a compulsive experience, which poses disconcerting problems of meaning for her and perhaps even frightens her; she is unable to work a transformative or a positive meaning out of her symbolic creation, something that Balgan will do for her in the third session. In the meantime, her tendency for regression is repeated in the second session also, something that will lead Balgan to offer a first interpretation of the dream.

5.3.2. 2nd curing session – 4 March: the dream as a resistance to the cure

This session was shorter than the previous one. Balgan asked Arzhana how she was feeling, and she replied that she was better, though some pain in her belly persisted. He laid his right hand on her belly to find out if there was much doora left inside, and he turned to me saying: "Today we will cure the nervous system and the right side of the belly; because all diseases result from failure of the nervous system". The cure of the nervous system involved a massage in her head (I will not describe it, because it is not

[21] See the chapter "Representation and Symbol Formation in a Psychoanalytic Anthropology", in his book "The work of culture: symbolic transformation in psychoanalysis and anthropology" (1990), pp. 3-68.
[22] Excerpt taken from one of our subsequent meetings.

relevant to Arzhana's pain-reaction to bio-energy and to the symbolisation of this reaction through dreaming). I relay the part of their dialogue related to Arzhana's dream.

Arzhana: Yesterday night I had the same dream again. I was walking alone and crying.

Balgan (to me): Why did she have this dream? Can you tell?

Kostas: No.

Balgan: She had this dream because her organism had got used to living with doora for many years. Now doora has been removed from the body, therefore she has to live without it. This is why she is crying and she is walking alone, because she is looking for it.

Balgan laid his right hand on the right part of Arzhana's belly and passed energy to her. He placed his left hand on the base of her spinal column for the same purpose and asked Arzhana if she was feeling anything. Arzhana mentioned feelings of burning in her belly and her back. Balgan responded that this is a sign that her organism was reacting to the energy, and estimated that it would take six sessions overall to completely cure her. Arzhana complained that in the previous night she was having pains in her chest during her sleep. Balgan assured her that these pains were signs of progressive recovery and mentioned that the right side of her belly would be cured after this session. Arzhana said that she was feeling a burning and a pain, this time in the right side of her belly and in her back. Balgan commented that he had given too much energy, which instigated a reaction within her. He then sat on a chair facing Arzhana at a small distance and fixed his eyes at her for a few seconds, leaning backwards as if he were trying to widen his visual field. By this, Balgan observed Arzhana's *aura*, which he defined to me as a protection, which humans are born with and which is ruptured when one is afflicted with curses[23]. Balgan concluded that Arzhana's "aura" had been fixed. He advised her to rest for two days, until the bio-energy inside her had eliminated the remnants of doora. Arzhana will return on the 7th of March, when the continuation of the cure will be determined by her experiential responses.

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[23] Just like "bio-energiya", "aura" is a loan-term from Russian "New Age" discourse, where it denotes an emanation or radiation, which a person's physical presence emits, or a distinctive but intangible quality surrounding a person.

Here, I will focus on the meaning of the dream, which appears for a second time. According to this, Arzhana – or, more precisely, a part of her person which is beyond conscious awareness and appears in her dream – flees away to re-embrace the removed doora (in the next session Balgan will identify this fragment as the soul, sünezin). Balgan's interpretation of the dream is based on the cultural notion of a painful experience as a result of the removal of doora from the body. Arzhana is crying, because she is searching for doora which had become an integral part of her personality, while its absence generates feelings of emptiness.

I suggest that her compulsion to re-embrace doora implies that Arzhana wishes – perhaps even unconsciously – to sustain a distressing psychosomatic experience, which informs her identity and narrative as a curse-afflicted individual. Doora has become indispensable for the particularity of her person. If she loses this part of her person, which differentiates her from her fellowmen, she is bereft of the distinctive feature of her person and is relegated to the sphere of ordinary life (where her cure attempts to re-introduce her). The uniqueness of her person emerges from the fact that she has internalised a non-human entity, doora. If this is removed, she will be separated from the special dimension of her person and she will return to everyday life as an unimportant layperson. At the level of social interaction, she will be an uninteresting (to her friends, parents, and me) person. By contrast, concern with doora fills her time and energy; thus, she does not need to worry about everyday issues, such as job and marriage. Affliction with doora releases her from the task of getting married and having a family, the ultimate purpose of adult life in Tuva; therefore, it legitimises her narrowing of activities into an exclusive occupation with the circumstances of her misfortunes. These misfortunes form her special narrative, whereby she constructs her self-identity and represents herself to her social world. Calling upon this narrative, her personal drama of curse affliction by the wicked ex-employer, she can attract attention from her social surroundings.

In this light, her promptness in my request to meet her (section 5.2), something that puzzled me, becomes meaningful: her curse-narrative is for her a means to attract the attention of a foreign researcher, that is, a special kind of interlocutor, who may establish her case as a subject of scrutiny in the academic society abroad[24]. By this, I do not mean

[24] Arzhana was keen on learning what I was writing about her; I cannot remember of a single week during our interaction, when she did not phone me at least three times per week, asking lively what I was writing about her (Arzhana could not read English, though some weeks before I left Tuva she told me that she had begun classes in English). Nevertheless, she never indicated to me what to write; nor did she express any interest in co-authorship.

that Arzhana plays theatre in order to attract my attention; her suffering is genuine, as her vivid (and at some points, indignant) account of approximately two years of bullying by her employer and of suspicions of being cursed by her will show (section 5.4). Rather, her promptness signifies a belief that she differs from the rest. In fact, Arzhana boldly expressed this belief with the following lament with which she concluded her narrative of her successive misfortunes due to curse affliction in our independent meeting on the 11th of March: "Why have all these misfortunes happened to me in particular? Nobody from my acquaintances has suffered from something like that"[25]. Arzhana cannot represent herself in any other way but recalling the characteristics of her misfortune: illness, conflict, kargysh (curses), and personal frustration. These are the elements of the dismal universe she lives in; a universe sharply objectified in her disconcerting dream of crying and walking alone. Rationalisation of her misfortunes and utilisation of them for personal benefit is subsequent to this terrifying realisation.

5.3.3. 3rd curing session, 7 March: transcending resistance

Arzhana came to the Association in the usual hour, after she was sent away to rest for two days. No curing took place this morning either, as Balgan decided not to interrupt the workings of energy inside her body. Here, I relay the part of their dialogue that refers to pain as a reaction to energy and to the interpretation of Arzhana's dream.

Balgan: How were you feeling these days that I sent you off?

Arzhana: I was feeling better, though I was having pains in my belly several times. I was having these pains this morning as well.

Balgan: a process of transformation is taking place inside you. There is a war going on in her body (to me; pointing to Arzhana at that time). This is why she is having these pains.

Arzhana: In the night after the last session, I saw the same dream again. I was crying and walking alone.

Balgan (to me): This dream has two meanings. The first is that her soul, sünezin, is looking for doora and she is crying, because she cannot find it. The second is that her sunezin returned to her body, after I removed doora. She is crying from happiness, because she found her lost soul. Today it is the first day that you feel less pain, is that so?

[25] This is Arzhana's subjective conviction regarding the uniqueness of her person after the internalisation of doora, yet my fieldwork reveals that her case is one of a bold – and increasing – flow of Tuvans suspecting or accusing their enemies of curse-inflicted misfortunes. This means that even Arzhana's acquaintances may have found themselves in Arzhana's position in the past – or they may find themselves in this position in the future.

This condition has to become stronger. I will let her rest one more day (to me). Tomorrow, we will see whether we have to complete the cure or continue it. This is because I gave too much energy.

Kostas: Why did you give so much?

Balgan: Because there is so much energy in me that I can cure people in three sessions. Other times, I cure only once and people recover immediately. But in her case this is a chronic illness. Therefore, I have to cure her several times.

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Here, I will dwell upon the meaning of the dream, as the interpretation is developed. The succession whereby the two opposed interpretations of the dream are presented possibly suggests that Balgan is following a strategy, which aims to lead Arzhana to a transition from crying as a sign of loss of doora to crying as a welcome to a good quality, sunezin, which has filled her empty body. His strategy is unfolded as follows: in the first curing session, he avoids explaining the dream; he possibly intends to make Arzhana reflect on dreaming of the part of herself, which tends to re-embrace doora. Arzhana has this dream again. In the first interpretation of the dream, he explains the dream in terms of her return to Ak-Dovurak in search of doora, as if he intended to lead Arzhana to start to conceptualise this dream as a return to her negative past. Arzhana sees this dream once more. In the present session, he repeats this explanation (using the term "sunezin" instead of "Arzhana"), but he presents an additional explanation: Arzhana is crying out of happiness for the return of her sünezin. It seems that Balgan leads Arzhana through the experience of regressing to a negative psychological condition in order later to offer a resolution. His strategy is successful, since, in my knowledge, Arzhana never sees this dream again.

I would like now to revisit the representation of the body as penetrable by antithetic forces with an emphasis on the two-way movement of sünezin. According to this, Arzhana's sünezin and doora are mutually exclusive entities and, therefore, cannot coexist in her body; or at least they have to compete for the same space. The inflow of doora in the body entails the outflow of sünezin or else, its dissociation from the body; the "empty space" is possessed by an alien entity, doora, which gradually becomes a vital constituent of the person. In reverse, the inflow of bio-energy in the body entails the outflow of doora; the "empty space" is re-possessed by her sünezin after the inflow of bio-energy, something that makes Arzhana cry, initially from a sense of loss, later from happiness. The second interpretation of the dream clearly reveals the image of the body

as penetrable by antithetical forces, an idea which is thus revealed as pervading the ontology of shamanistic curing in Tuva. The pattern of trajectories, which emerges from the changed balance between doora and sünezin, displays a polarity. This consists of two principles: first, doora-inflow entails sünezin-outflow; second, the inflow of bio-energy entails doora-outflow and repossession of the body by the soul (sünezin).

5.3.4. 4th curing session, 8 March: Balgan's "psychotic flight"

This was meant to be the final curing session, as Balgan concluded – by laying his hand on Arzhana's belly – that most of doora had been eliminated by the energy he had been giving during the previous sessions. This session, in the course of which Balgan removed the last remnants of doora from her body, lasted about an hour. Compared to the previous ones, the session I describe below was unusual, to my ethnographic experience, since its focus was not on physiological processes occurring inside Arzhana's body, but on Balgan's own inner state, as this was externalised in the context of this session. I relay the part of our dialogue, which is relevant to the discussion following.

Balgan: I guarantee 100% success. After this session, her immune system will be perfectly working. Time after time my energy ascends onto higher levels; this is why I can treat people from diseases considered incurable, such as cancer. This energy is similar to x-ray therapy. I can break kidney stones simply by laying my hand on one's body. It seems that my grandmother has implanted an apparatus for shamanism within me.

[Balgan is at the same time giving energy to Arzhana by laying his hand on her belly].

Kostas: what kind of apparatus is this?

Balgan: Curing people (pause). There are still some remnants of doora in the right side; they are disappearing. I think there is a diagnostic apparatus within my body. This is why I can perform a diagnosis even more accurately than the doctors in the hospital can. It many times happened that the relatives of a patient invited me to the hospital to save the latter's life. I throw doora away and they recover instantly. This is because of the energy I have inside me.

Kostas: What does this energy feel like?

Balgan: If I spend a couple of days without curing people, I will go into hysterics and fall sick. I must urgently come here and shamanize. If I do not, I will fall in a fit.

At that moment, Balgan is removing doora from Arzhana's body and rushing out growling to throw it away. He comes back and sits on his chair breathing heavily due to exertion. He goes on as follows:

Listen to me! What is there in my organism? The hereditary gift [of shamanism] from my ancestors[26]! Sometimes I feel as if there is something terrible living inside me.

Kostas: Why terrible? What's that?

Balgan: Albys. It is the albys who cures people, not me. It shows to me where doora is hidden in the patient's body and it instructs me how to throw it away and cure.

Kostas: But why is it terrible?

Balgan: Sometimes I feel as if I am not a human being (an answer accompanied by a very strange countenance). When I was a child, and until Arzhana's age, I would be frightened each time the spirits appeared before me. They had a horrible appearance. My relatives took me to the psychiatric hospital, because they thought I was psychotic[27]. But there was no psychosis. It was communication with spirits. I am able to contact the spirits, because my grandmother has passed her energy to me. In this way she possesses me. It will do no good to try to get rid of her; I will fall into fits. The only means to find peace is to cure people with this energy. Some people, who also possess this energy, do not know how to use it, and they end up in the psychiatric hospital. This is because the albys turns against them and drives them mad. But there is somebody here telling me how to use the albys. Initially, I was afraid of it, but later on I got used to it and we became best friends.

Kostas: Who is this person?

Balgan: I think it is my grandmother. Other times, I think it is the albys who talks to me, but it is probably not an albys. It is my grandmother; because, as a shaman, I do not draw my power from the albys, but from my grandmother, who was a heavenly shaman.

[I discerned an uncertainty in Balgan's voice.]

Kostas: Then why did you say that there is an albys close to you?

Balgan: Because sometimes I suspect that it is the albys. But it is my grandmother who instructs me how to cure. Each time I think it is the albys, I enter a state of madness. (Balgan is nervously touching the temples of his head with eyes closed, visualising the rampant course of the albys). My thought is unstoppable. It (the albys) goes fast through mountains and rivers, and, oh, *it fell on the water just like I did*. *Now I calmed down* (pause). *Because when I was born, my grandmother washed me in the cold water of the*

[26] In Russian: *potomstvennyi dar ot predkov*.

[27] This is reminiscent of the case of a young man in the capital city of Yakutsk (Sakha Republic). This man is hospitalised as a psychotic due to frightening visions of being dismembered by demons – that is, visions that are signs of his shamanic calling (as a consequence of his shamanic ancestry). Unfortunately, he has to spend his lifetime within a psychiatric clinic, being tormented by experiences which psychiatrists diagnose as signs of psychosis, in the absence of elder Yakut shamans who could assist him in his initiation (Piers Vitebsky, personal communication).

river, so that I would not speak the evil language of albys (his characteristic uproarious laughter following).

[The reader will find my analysis of Balgan's above narrative of his bio-energy in section 6.1 (Chapter 6). The sentences in italics are crucial for this analysis.]

Soon afterwards the session ended, since Arzhana was declared completely cured. Balgan stressed that Arzhana should definitely arrange a dagylga ritual in summertime to ask the spirits to give her a child, and he suggested she should drop by the Association to let us know about her post-treatment condition.

5.4. Suspiciousness of "deleterious" intentions: the "black tea" incident

In late afternoon of March, the 11th, Arzhana visited me in my apartment at my invitation. For about three hours we were discussing her tumultuous interaction with her employer, as well as a curious (for Arzhana) interrelation of events in the Dept. of Accounts (her workplace), which led Arzhana to long suspicions of shamanic cursing commissioned by the employer against her. Below I present her heated testimony of poignant experiences under the oppressiveness of the employer, which involves a curse accusation against the latter:

That woman (the ex-employer) is evil; she is herself a curse, she could not restrain her envy (*zavist'*) against me. She was telling me: "Everything is fine for you, Arzhana. You are a young woman and you have a man and you can have a family. But I grew old and I am still on my own". She would secretly invite shamans to send kargysh against me and some other girls working there. One of these girls was not in good terms with her either. One day she saw a shaman in her office. Some time later, most of us were fired. When somebody she is envious of is having problems, she celebrates it (*y neyo prazdnik*). She is such an energetic and fighting person; when normal people are tired of working, she goes on. People say that she is a schizophrenic.

I believe that she receives energy from shamans. When she was at my age, she was not working so much. Perhaps if she had a husband, she would be a better person. Sometimes we had to work until very late in the evening for three days successively or even longer. She would not let us go even for a single minute. On a Friday evening, I wanted to go home, despite the workload. I told her that I would turn up at 12 a.m. the following day and she scolded me: "You want to leave your job as soon as possible and go to your man! But where can I go? (*A mnie kuda*?). There is nobody waiting for me (*Mnie nikovo nieto*). You are going nowhere! You will keep working tonight until you finish the work, and tomorrow you will come in early morning". If she were a normal person, she would not behave like that. She wanted me to live like her. She is not

beautiful[28], but if she had a good soul, she could find a husband. Who would like to marry such a terrible woman? You should be sitting next to me, when I was working with her. Once I showed up in my workplace, wearing a golden ring. As soon as she saw it, I heard from her: "Instead of looking at your work, you are dealing with jewels". I rushed outside upset and threw the ring away. When you are happy, she is envying you. She will hassle you in any case (*Obizatel'no poluchishch ot nieyo*)!

[At this point, I showed interest in meeting with her ex-employer and discussing with her Arzhana's complaints of being humiliated and her curse accusations. Arzhana gave me permission to meet her, but she would not discuss my proposal to discuss her poignant experiences and her accusations with her ex-employer. She suggested something else instead: "You may pretend that you have not seen me for a long time and just dropped by for this. But she is such a nasty person that, if you tell her about me, she might beat you. She will tell you that I was not working too hard". I decided not to seek her ex-employer, fearing that this could lead to unpleasant complications regarding my research].

We will recall that in the cleansing session (5.2) Balgan "saw" an Armenian woman cursing Arzhana in her workplace, as well as a Buryat woman who was allegedly implicated in Arzhana's misfortunes. In our meeting, Arzhana confirmed that she had seen an Armenian woman entering in the Dept. of Accounts. In the process, I will present her testimony of an association of events involving an ambiguous interaction between the employer and the Armenian, which led Arzhana to suspicions of being cursed. But, before that, I will relay her comment on how she received Balgan's divination:

I had not told Balgan anything beforehand and I was flabbergasted to realise that he was seeing that this woman came to my workplace by peering at the employer's name on paper[29]. I was frightened when Oyumaa looked at the name and left the paper on the desk saying that it was terrible. Before I left from the Association, I asked her what she had seen on the paper. She told me that she and Balgan had seen various shamans cursing me; and two women, an Armenian and a Buryat, *kara-sөөk* people, who cursed me.

[Comment: "Kara-sөөk" means "black bone" in Tuvan. According to Balgan, Tuvans apply this designation to Central Asian people (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, and Georgia). Balgan did not explain why this is so (apart from

[28] I can confirm this (Arzhana gave me a photo showing the employer and the girls, including herself, who were working in the Dept. of Accounts; the photo was taken a year before Arzhana gave up her position).
[29] I am not concerned here with how Balgan found out this. Though I take seriously into account his claim that intuition is indispensable to divination (section 2.2), the most probable scenario is that the incident with the Armenian somewhat slipped from Arzhana's tongue during her narrative (section 5.2).

saying that it is customary), though I suspect that it has to do with the quite common (among ethnic Tuvans) belief that magic is thriving among these nationalities. I never heard Tuvans calling the Buryat "kara-sөөk". However, Arzhana told me that Tuvans believe that Buryat are experts in black magic; according to her, Tuvans use to ascribe this designation to any Buryat[30]. I must mention that during the cleansing session I had noticed Balgan's reference of the Buryat woman and had elicited more information about her, which I relayed to Arzhana in our forthcoming meeting. According to Balgan, it was not the employer who had commissioned the Armenian to curse Arzhana (as she believed), but the Buryat woman who in this way intended to make Arzhana lose her position (yet Balgan reaffirmed that the ex-employer had independently cursed Arzhana by means of commissioning shamans). As Balgan explained, the Buryat woman did so, because she wanted to place an unemployed relative of hers in Arzhana's position. In our meeting, Arzhana expressed disbelief in this explanation; she was adamant that it was the employer who had commissioned the Armenian. Nonetheless, a few weeks later, she recalled that she had heard of an old Buryat woman living in Ak-Dovurak, who was rumoured to be dealing with black magic, as well as of an Armenian witch working in Kyzyl (though she was not sure whether it was this particular Armenian witch who had appeared in her workplace). This possibly suggests that Arzhana pondered over the truthfulness of Balgan's explanation.]

As to her experience of curse affliction by the Armenian in her workplace:

I did not like her since the first moment I saw her; an old woman wearing ragged clothes. It was already 12 a.m. and I was about to have a break for lunch. But at that moment a customer wanted to have an account checked. I could have left, but another accountant who should be in her desk, was late. I respect the customers[31] and I stayed to check the account. At that time, this gypsy woman (*tsyganka*) came in. She was selling blinds, but I did not pay attention to her. Most of the other accountants had already gone. My employer received her in her office and asked her brother who was also there to go to the bank and bring money. She had run out of money; she even asked money from me, but I told her that I did not have any with me. It is good that I did not give her. A couple of minutes later, her brother came back from the bank. She was telling that this gypsy woman demanded a fee of 4,000 rubles; but she herself said so, I did not hear her telling this.

[30] The same holds for the Darhad in north-western Mongolia. A shaman of Balgan's Association told me that a great shamanic war involving devastating curse-exchanges between Tuvans and Darhad took place in the first decades of the 20th century.

[31] Her voice revealed a sense of compassion at that moment, a sign that she is a considerate worker.

[I am asking her who said this.]

The employer. I do not know what she asked from that woman, but she told the girls that her wish would be fulfilled. When the girls came back from lunch, she told them that she gave this money to the Armenian, who kept only 100 rubles for herself and burnt all the rest in her office. Then she asked the employer to gather the ashes and take them to the graveyard in no longer than two hours. She warned her that if she did not do as told, things would turn out very bad for her. The employer rushed to the graveyard with a pouch containing the ashes. Even though I was present at this event, I could not pay attention to what was going on, because I had a customer on my hands. I did not see these things happening, but I am telling you whatever she told the other girls. I cannot tell for sure, but this might have happened. But before that, something else happened. Some minutes before the gypsy woman came, I noticed that the employer was standing for a few seconds behind my back; then, she came close and left a cup of tea on my desk. After that, she quietly started walking away. I looked at the cup, and it was filled with extremely black (*chiornyi, prichiornyi*) tea; it was impossible to drink it. An ominous feeling seized me. I told her: "You forgot your tea on my desk. Could you please remove it?" My desk was full of papers and this cup was bothering me. She turned to me, looking embarrassed. I repeated: "Take your cup from my desk, please". She moved her hands awkwardly and replied: "I have never brought you a cup of tea, Arzhana". I asked her: "Why don't you offer tea to the other girls as well?" She replied: "Let them make their own". I found this very suspicious. I took the cup and I was going around without knowing what to do with it. Finally, I spilled the tea into a flowerpot. I should not be walking around with the cup in my hands. Instead, I should have left it on another desk next to mine. But I had never had such experiences before; I had never consulted shamans before, so I did not decipher the meaning of her act. Oyumaa explained to me that she did this to keep me there and kill me with curses. During these moments, she was having the gypsy woman in her office and they were doing their own things against me. I felt that there was something terrible going on. Until now, I regret having stayed in the office during lunchtime. I should have refused to deal with the account and told to the customer: "This is it, I'm off for lunch". But I am not used to turning the customers away. In the event, I stayed there and received her curses.

After this incident, which occurred in March 2002 (one year before she consulted Balgan), Arzhana kept on working for six months in the Department of Accounts under a suspicion of an insidious plan contrived against her until September 2002. Then, a crisis between the employer and her broke out which brought the end of her employment there. I was not able to clarify what the cause was, though from Arzhana's description I got the impression that she had undertaken to sort out an issue which fell within the employer's jurisdiction. The employer's reaction was piercing:

She shouted at me: "You are such an insidious person! Such a young girl and you want to take my position!" I rushed out crying and went to my apartment. I was crying until the morning of the next day. At that night, I cursed her, not loudly, but from within

my soul: "God[32], where are you looking at (*Gospodi, kuda ty smotrish*)? Why did she offend me so badly? I haven't done anything wrong to her. God, if you exist, why don't you punish that woman?" One of my colleagues knew that I was in a bad state, and came to see me in the morning. I told her that I would never go back to this job and that I was determined to stop living like that. The next day I learned from some girls in the office that she was standing like a heroine (Arzhana's voice reaches a pitch of indignation at that moment) and boasting: "You should have seen her face after I hassled her! She probably spent the whole night crying". Then, I applied for a position in another public service in the same town, but they rejected me. I am convinced that she was behind that; she probably asked the Head of that service to not employ me. I needed to work and I am able to work; but this woman *closed the road* (*zakryla dorogu*) ahead of me. After that, I returned to my parents in Kyzyl. I was so distressed that I was crying all the way in the bus.

Some days before I left the job, my health problem reappeared with a relapse. I had just returned from Novosibirsk, when I fell down with terrible pains in my belly. On Friday, I went to the hospital and the doctors told me that they could not help me. I thought: "I lost my health, but I still have my job". On Monday, I lost my job as well. But it is good that I left from that place. If you know too many things, she is envying you. If I were in her place, my relations with the employees would be fine. And I would permit them to do anything they like (*vsio chto ugodno*); if, for example, somebody wants to have a break, he is free to do so. But she is envious, and I saw the results of her envy. In February she phoned to ask me to return to my old position: "Come back to us, Arzhana, everything will be fine this time", she said. I refused.

Her narrative ended with her subsequent abandonment by her partner (section 5.2).

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I will dwell on a number of issues which are central to Arzhana's experiences of oppression by the employer and to her suspicions that the latter commissioned shamans and the Armenian to curse her. The first concerns the employer's envy toward Arzhana. It emerges from her testimony that it is the employer's sexual frustration that lies behind her tyranny toward Arzhana. The employer suffers from sexual frustration and is jealous of Arzhana's womanhood, as this is expressed through her affair and her potential for childbearing. Arzhana believes that if her ex-employer had a husband, she would not be oppressive, probably because she would be able to live a sexual life. Her deprivation is given an expression, which I would call sadistic: that is, an inclination to subject Arzhana (and the other girls of the Dept.) to a daily regimen of working tyranny. She imposes an austere, almost military discipline on the employees, as if she intended to lead them to

[32] Arzhana explained that she was referring to the Buddha whom she imagines as a woman dressed in white. In her own words: "When I am in a bad state, I think about her; it is my personal fantasy. This is how I imagine God, as a kind (*dobraya*) and affectionate (*loskovaya*) woman". This could be Tara or Kwan Yin, well-known forms of the Buddha.

exhaustion and deprive them of their sexual vitality. She scolds Arzhana for an interest in jewels, attempting to strip her with acrimonious language from symbols enhancing her attractiveness. And she actually confesses her jealousy by hassling Arzhana for a desire to leave her job and return to her partner, whereas she laments her own loneliness (assuming that Arzhana is not constructing an image of her ex-employer as desperate for companionship in order to ventilate her own antipathy towards the ex-employer).

Arzhana observes that the employer displays a phenomenal capacity for work, a propensity which she has imposed on her employees. Obviously, she cannot rationalise the employer's obsession with work, an inclination that (for her) defies any reasonable perception of human endurance, and invokes a shamanic repertoire of the imagination in order to explain it: internalisation of energy by the shamans she cooperates with. To support this, she observes that her ex-employer was not a hard worker when she was at her age. Thus, this obsession is not an innate property, but the manifestation of a terrible force, which she has acquired from shamans. This force has transformed her into a ruthless administrator, working out the annihilation of Arzhana at two levels: first, by imposing an intolerable regime; second, by commissioning shamanic cursing against her.

Nevertheless, attempting an empathetic projection into Arzhana's thoughts about her employer, I would surmise that she harbours malign sentiments toward the employer. Her involvement in the employer's duties – as this transpires from the latter's indignant reaction – perhaps betrays her unwillingness to comply with the employer's seniority, or even rebellious impulses towards the latter (which would expectably be intensified due to the bullying she claims to have suffered). Arzhana instigates the employer's anger after having violated the latter's seniority and authority, which come with age and experience. My point is that breaking the code of seniority is the only means available in the context of Arzhana's professional interaction with her employer, in order to sever an unwanted relationship. Curse accusation cannot be manipulated as an idiom for structuring (or pausing) interactions between white-collar workers; if Arzhana had invoked this idiom in order to sever interaction with her employer, she would probably have been labelled as an insane by her employer and would have been exposed in her office (and generally in the society of Ak-Dovurak). At the surface level, standard rules of professional conduct may prevent one from voicing a curse accusation; yet suspicions of curse affliction – as well as suppressed aggression against the stern employer – can be canalised through secretive discourses, as gossip and defamation. But in Arzhana's case it is rather unlikely that such discourses offer an effective outlet for canalising aggression; moreover, it does not

facilitate severance (if this is what she wants). To achieve this, she must manipulate an idiom from the symbolic repertoire of her professional environment: breaching the code of hierarchy. Outwardly, Arzhana expresses her disagreement with her employer's rules and with her manner of handling crises in professional interactions, something that legitimises her resignation; and, at the same time, she achieves a blow to the employer's professionalism (satisfying to some extent, I presume, retaliatory desires), by creating – or reinforcing – an image of her as a tyrant. Yet, at a deeper level, breaching the code of hierarchy permits her to sever an ambiguous and tense interaction, and thus to find relief from disturbing suspicions of curse affliction, induced by curious (for her) visitations, such as those of various shamans and of the Armenian.

I would like to dwell a bit further on the issue of Arzhana's subjective experience of curse affliction, because her case, I think, brilliantly indicates that, as a habit of mind indispensable to curse accusations, suspiciousness inevitably leads to – overdetermines, we could say – conflict. I asked her if she had any convincing *evidence* (*dokazatel'stvo*, in Russian), which would lead somebody to interpret the interrelation of the incidents she relayed – the Armenian's appearance at a moment when Arzhana was alone in the office, the secret interaction between her and the employer (and her brother), and the offer of a cup of tea – as a palpable sign of curse-attack against her, and not as a coincidence of unrelated events. Arzhana invoked a special feature of her narrative of curse affliction, ominous and terrible feelings of being cursed, which were instigated by the tea-offer and culminated during the minutes that the Armenian was in the employer's office. For her these feelings were the evidence I sought. As such, her suspicions display the features of "paranoid speculation" (cf. Marcus 1999): that is, they are triggered by several events, whose simultaneous occurrence is enough to incite Arzhana's attention; yet, due to their ambivalent meaning, these events cannot provide empirical evidence of curse affliction (what they can do is trigger or intensify imputations and suspicions of curse affliction). The ambivalence intrinsic in these events leads Arzhana to "paranoid" suspiciousness over the intentions of the actors engaging in them. Arzhana cannot fathom what is going on inside the employer's office; the events can take two meanings: either the employer is interested in buying blinds from the Armenian or the latter is a witch commissioned by the former. Arzhana would be released from suspicions, only if the door opened before her: her fears would be either confirmed or dismissed. We are inevitably led back to the

problem of the distinction between practices and suspicions/accusations of witchcraft[33], which, unfortunately, I cannot solve for the Tuvan case (due to lack of ethnographic evidence regarding the practice of shamanic cursing). What we can make of Arzhana's case is that ambiguity in determining the intentions beneath observable events triggers suspicions leading to overt conflict.

In section 5.3.2, I argued that Arzhana constructs a self-representation as a special individual out of her narrative of curse affliction: she intends to show that she is the victim of the employer's unjust cursing. Now the full exposition of this narrative seems to reinforce this interpetation. A careful reading of her narrative yields a contradiction: on the one hand, she reports ominous/terrible feelings, something that reveals suspiciousness of curse affliction; yet, on the other, she claims not to have deciphered the meaning of the tea-offer and of the Armenian's visit, until she consulted Balgan. I suspect that Arzhana is constructing her innocence on the basis of an inability to perceive the employer's insidious plan; owing to her (alleged) ignorance of the secrets of cursing, as well as to her professional conscientiousness, she remains at her desk and is exposed to the curses. Undoubtedly, Arzhana took the tea-offer and the Armenian's presence as signs of an imminent curse affliction (something possibly based on her preoccupation with curse affliction which she had cultivated through gossip about the employer's interactions with shamans). Her reference that she did not know what to do with the cup of tea is, I think, designed to reveal ignorance of how to cope with a substance contaminated with the employer's curses and malicious thoughts. The fact that she believed that the tea was suffused with dangerous psychic forces can be inferred from her reluctance to drink it, possibly lest she internalises the miasma in it; and also from her comment that she should have left the cup to another desk (displacing the miasma elsewhere). Her reference of the extreme blackness of the tea possibly suggests that this tea was aesthetically displeasing to her; this perhaps added to her belief that the tea was contaminated with curses. I did not check Arzhana's reaction to the tea with other informants, so I cannot tell whether black tea in Tuva has a symbolic meaning of curse affliction or Arzhana's thought that the tea contained curses is an idiosyncratic construction (though I am inclined toward the latter). Drinking black tea (tea without milk) is common among Russians, as well as among Russianised Siberians (Piers Vitebsky, personal communication), though not

[33] See section 1.1.

among ethnic Tuvans, who, as far as I know, drink tea with milk[34]. If I am right, it follows that the offer of black tea intensified Arzhana's suspicions of curse affliction. Yet her description of the employer's awkwardness after leaving the cup on her desk perhaps reveals the employer's malign intentions beneath a "polite" gesture; or perhaps it does not (a problem that, as I argued regarding the ambiguous interaction between the Armenian and the employer, intensifies her suspicions). I would like to guess that offering black tea takes a particular meaning in the context of the interaction between the employer and Arzhana: it is intended to communicate to the latter abysmal, "deleterious" feelings, although in an elegant and diplomatic manner, as befits to a Soviet-acculturated professional.

Now, I want to pass from the subjective to the social pole of Arzhana's evidence of curse affliction: gossip and rumours regarding the employer's alleged interaction with shamans. It is noticeable that Arzhana grounds her accusation on what her colleagues told to her on the basis of what the latter ones had learned from the employer herself, who, as Arzhana claims, relayed to them the Armenian's magic. Thus, Arzhana learns from them that the employer's wish would be realised, but the content of this wish remains unknown to her. Motivated by suspiciousness of the Armenian's complicity, she fills this gap with her anxieties of being the target of the employer's curse-suffused rancour. This is another example of the "paranoid" speculation, which I established above regarding ambivalence in the meaning of the events; her suspiciousness drives her to invest a statement charged with ambiguity – fulfilment of the employer's wish – with a meaning of a curse-plan targeting her. At a certain moment in her narrative, she is playing with doubts over the reality of these events; as she claims, even though she was present at the incident of the imputed magic, she could not pay attention to this, because she was busy with a client. Taking into account the anxiety she felt in the presence of the Armenian, it is difficult to accept this claim. I would interpret this as an additional attempt to construct her identity as an innocent victim of the employer's maliciousness.

The employees' gossip and rumours were being circulated before the incident with the Armenian and their circulation must have been continued on the basis of this incident. By gossiping about their employer's secret activities, Arzhana and the other girls of the Department are pre-constructing her identity as a nasty and envious woman, who is externalising her frustration against them. Thus, Arzhana's sensitivity to curse

[34] The only exception to this is green tea, which Tuvans drink without milk.

affliction has already been moulded by this gossip, until one day she is confronted with what she was expecting to happen: an experience of curse affliction; that is, something that has been the subject of gossip. Her suspicion of the employer's evil plan against her is reaffirmed by the other girls' reproduction of the employer's account of the Armenian's magic. She takes this as an indication that the employer cursed her; in turn, this intensifies her suspicions, something that probably gives rise to further rumours about the employer, until this vicious circle of suspicions, ambiguous events allegedly involving shamans, and gossip culminates into a crisis ending Arzhana's employment at the Dept. of Accounts.

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The effects of the employer's magic are revealed through successive misfortunes: in September 2002 Arzhana suffers a relapse of her health problem and she is diagnosed as having incurable infertility; a couple of days later she quits her job after the crisis with the employer; she applies for another position, but she is rejected after the ex-employer's interference (as she herself believes); and in February 2003 her partner abandons her for a mistress who is expecting his child. As Oyumaa divined, Arzhana's days would have been numbered, if the curses had not been removed from her. Finally, Arzhana survived the employer's curses, but she did so at an inexorable cost: sick and deprived of the joy of childbirth, unemployed and abandoned by her partner.

In my view, what Arzhana's misfortunes express is that the totality of her womanhood was blocked by the employer's curses. These afflictions annihilated her sexuality, the most defining aspect of womanhood, which is expressed through the potential for companionship and childbearing. The curses display specificity in causing misfortune: that is, they afflict particular aspects of Arzhana's totality as a human and social being – those related to companionship and fertility. The destruction of her capacity for procreation deprives Arzhana of her femininity in a culture where marriage and childbirth is a woman's main life-purpose. However, I do not think that these afflictions were directed at Arzhana's job at the Dept. of Accounts. The employer did not want to turn Arzhana away from her job; to this end, she blocked her application for another job – as Arzhana believes – and asked her to return to her post several months after the crisis. I would surmise that she needs a sexually frustrated Arzhana in order to externalise her own sexual frustration. In other words, she needs a pathetic Arzhana who has been incapacitated by the same frustration, which she herself suffers from.

It emerges that the employer's curses possess a *repetitive* and *transitive* quality: by means of these attacks the employer passes to Arzhana her sterility and inability in finding a man, which come with ageing. That the annihilation of her sexuality constitutes a repetition of her employer's condition can also be inferred from Balgan's following comment: "31 years old and she has not given birth yet! She fell sick from the employer's curses and she stopped having menstruation; this means that a terrible curse, chatka, afflicted her. She suffered from premature ageing due to these curses". Thus, these curses create an analogy between the employer and Arzhana, pervaded by a shared loss of womanhood. The former was deprived of the joy of having sexual life and descendants (possibly due to her unattractiveness); by cursing Arzhana she instils inside her aspects of her own impotence which are revealed through a diagnosis of sterility and a loss of partner to another woman. Having internalised doora – an extension of the employer's curses – Arzhana mirrored her employer's condition in the form of premature ageing; she was turning into her employer, until Balgan worked his hands on her generative organs and handicapped sexuality.

5.5. Conclusion

Arzhana's case provides an instructive example of the particularities under which social change has appeared in Tuva: a mixture occurs between a pre-Soviet repertoire of conflict (shamanic cursing) and forms of social (professional) organisation, which were relatively recently imported to Tuva. Curse accusations emerge in the context of hierarchical relations defined by legitimate exertion (or by abuse) of authority; that is, relations structuring professional institutions, which were formed during Soviet times. In other words, this case shows that a double superimposition of meaning on social relations is taking place: a Soviet blueprint for interaction between white-collar workers, itself a universal product of the Western rationalist model of advancement, is applied to a segment of the bureaucratic mechanism, which is staffed by ethnic Tuvans; in turn, the latter ones invoke an element from the Tuvan repertoire of the imagination, curse affliction, in order to invest with meaning an alien (culturally) pattern of social interaction and the tensions or frustrations associated with it. At the level of surface reality, the imported model finds an ideal application in Arzhana's case: she exemplifies the transformation that urban Tuvans have undergone from a "tribal" society into a society of office-based workers, which has adopted Soviet aesthetic standards and norms of professional conduct. Yet, beneath the surface level, Arzhana invokes an element from

the Tuvan repertoire of the imagination, self-transformation by means of shamanic energy, in order to make sense of an overloaded working schedule circumscribing the responsibilities of an administrator. The very hierarchical structures of her workplace lead her to "paranoid" suspiciousness of curse affliction. In the case of Asian white-collar workers as Arzhana, new configurations of authority in bureaucratic contexts trigger a revival of an old Tuvan habit of mind, curse affliction.

All this leads us to an impressive finding: far from bringing about a decline in ideological commitment to these "traditional" patterns of thought, described as shamanic, the formation of a bureaucratic society in Tuva provides the ground for a revitalisation of certain aspects of these patterns. Despite their professional backgrounds, Arzhana and her colleagues – and, I suspect, hundreds of other bureaucrats, white-collar workers and politicians in Tuva – do not renounce the idiom of cursing as a "backward" or "superstitious" belief (of course, they might do so in public contexts), but invoke it in the form of curse accusations in their attempts to cope with the complexities of hierarchical/political structures. The above pattern of resorting to shamanic repertoires of the imagination as a response to modernisation is not new to Asian societies. Both Obeyesekere (1977) and Kendall (1996) discuss the efflorescence of ecstatic forms of religiosity and shamanic practices as a repercussion of urbanisation and transition to a bureaucratic organisation in Sri Lanka and Korea respectively[35]. Arzhana's case adds a post-Soviet Siberian example to this emerging contour. Throughout Asia shamanic traditions – or a particular component of them, the dark and demonic beliefs or practises of sorcery and shamanic cursing – are recovered from the past to invest with cultural meaning newly emergent fields of social interaction, such as those based on the impersonal norms of hierarchy and professional conduct; that is, on alien and thus anxiety-inducing kinds of relatedness. In Tuva the expansion of the repertoire of cursing into fields of modernity, such as the professional structures Arzhana partakes of, has broadened the scope of suspiciousness, triggering – I would like to guess – mass anxiety or even "curse paranoia". This is what Arzhana's case suggests: cursing, and the agents and practices through which it is actualised (the Armenian witch and her graveyard-sorcery), have intruded even in a modern sanctuary of rationality, such as a Dept. of Accounts. As we saw in this case, the result of this fusion between curse suspiciousness and Soviet modernity is ambiguity in ascribing meaning to observable facts; the

[35] For a discussion of these examples, see next chapter (section 6.3).

repertoire of cursing has infiltrated modernity and effected a change in its meaning: its premises now contain unobservable (for laypeople) realms of causality, where affliction is produced and directed outwards at selected targets.

Chapter 6. Shaman, Curse, Society

6.1. Perpetual non-resolution in a shaman's psychobiography

Here, drawing on Balgan's narrative of bio-energy and on his "psychotic flight" during Arzhana's last curing session (section 5.3.4), I attempt to unravel the motivational sources of his practising as a shaman. I argue that his shamanic person is pervaded by a conflict between two ancestral shamanic spirits representing a heavenly and an albys line respectively, which are the sources of his bio-energy and struggle within him in order to possess him as a vessel for their expression. At the same time, these spirits compel him to externalise the bio-energy; even if the conflict between the heavenly and albys tendencies occurring within Balgan is someday resolved with the prevalence of one tendency at the expense of the other, his hereditary compulsion for externalising bio-energy must remain unresolved, if he is to continue to practise as a shaman: as I shall suggest, this compulsion entails for Balgan an open-ended cycle, where he is caught into a canalisation and re-accumulation of bio-energy (for curing). An important implication of this premise is that, in curing with bio-energy, Balgan does not only cure the patient's suffering, but also attempts to release himself from this impulse – an attempt that, as we shall see, remains unfulfilled after each cure. In other words, Balgan is compelled to externalise an inner crisis through a curing session held for Arzhana, in order to find relief from this crisis – a kind of curing the self by the detour of the other, which nevertheless must never be concluded for Balgan to keep practising as a shaman.

To the reader familiar with the ethnography of Siberian shamanism, the argument that the curing session provides Balgan with a means in order to express an inner crisis will appear as reminiscent of the views held by early Soviet ethnographers on the shamanic séance as a "cult of madness"[1]. Basilov (1997) offers a fascinating review of the literature of shamanism as the "hysterical religion of Siberia". I relay two references, which are remarkably reminiscent of the proposition advanced here. The first one is by Tokarev, who supports the premise of the shaman's nervous instability, arguing that the "séance itself has much similarity to an hysterical attack"; while, according to the second by Anokhin, this predisposition to hysterical fits – a prerequisite for induction into the shaman's role – is passed on through heredity in the form of the shamanic illness, epilepsy: "against this wearisome, often fatal disease, the natives have no recourse other

[1] See the classic work "Kul't sumasshestviya v uralo-altaiskom shamanizme" ("The cult of madness in Ural-Altaic shamanism") by G.V. Ksenofontov [1928] (1992).

than the séance (which) offers the epileptic a release from illness" (both cited in Basilov 1990: 4-5; Basilov himself opposes the view of the shaman as insane). The curing session presented here seems to justify to some extent Tokarev's and Anokhin's premises that resorting to rituals provides the shaman with a cure from an inner crisis. Balgan reveals a personal impulse for performing cures, something that, according to him, offers a release from a proclivity to fits[2].

In the first and second case studies I discussed the two basic constituents of Balgan's symbol-system, retribution and healing. I argued that these constituents originate from several events, which had transformative implications for Balgan. In the first case study (section 3.5), I presented three stages of symbolic transformation involving three crucial events from Balgan's biography: 1) his election by the spirit of his grandmother, 2) his friends' deceit, and 3) the death of his ex-wife. On the basis of these events, I formulated a model of shamanic advancement, which consists of a cumulative development of shamanic faculties (rather than a unitary experience of a personal crisis being concluded with the assumption of the shaman's role), and argued that the repertoire of shamanic initiation in contemporary Tuva has expanded to incorporate ordinary misfortunes of everyday life next to the pre-Soviet pattern of initiation after election by ancestral shamanic spirits or affliction by a terrible spiritual force (albys). In this context, I identified two ordinary misfortunes from Balgan's psychobiography, which, as I argued, triggered a process of symbolic transformation: the death of his ex-wife became the onset of his transformation from an ill person to a shaman healing his clients' suffering; while his friends' deceit provided an impetus for the revelation of his retaliatory faculty. In the second case study (section 4.3), I traced the origins of this faculty in the killing of his grandmother by the Soviets and the insults which he suffered, events with transformative implications for Balgan. These misfortunes occurred within the historical contexts of post-socialism and Soviet repression respectively.

Now, I want to focus on a particular element of the "healing" component of his symbol-system, bio-energy. During the session, Balgan reveals terrifying experiences of seeing horrible-looking spirits as a child, saying that his ability to contact the spirits derives from the energy which his grandmother passed to him. Clearly, he does not refer to his narrative of his formal election in 1988, but to a much earlier bestowal of bio-

[2] By this I do not wish to give the impression that Balgan's description of a compulsion towards shamanic ritual is indicative of psychic illness. I return to this issue at the end of this section.

energy; what he probably means is that he was born with this energy[3]. In the process, he attempts to identify the source of this bestowal, oscillating between Kara-Kys and the albys. Finally, his self-designation as a shaman drawing his descent from the heavenly Kara-Kys prevails. Based on this, I introduce the final – and deepest – level of his shamanic initiation, which, as I will show, involves a conflict between two different shamanic tendencies within him. However, there is a crucial difference between this level and the previous ones: the bestowal of bio-energy does not seem to have any transformative implications for Balgan. Certainly, as an enabling predisposition or potential, it is the source of his becoming a shaman (the frightening visions of his childhood are marks of this process); nevertheless, unlike his grandmother's bestowal of her shamanic instruments (section 4.3), this bestowal does not lead Balgan to an advanced state of self-realisation or to a transformation. The contrary, it entangles him into an oscillation between Kara-Kys and the albys as the source of this bio-energy, which is resolved in his uncertain assertion that he draws his descent from the heavenly Kara-Kys. There is one more difference between this and the other levels of shamanic initiation: whereas the latter ones are triggered by events situated in the contexts of post-socialism and socialism respectively, the bestowal of bio-energy and its manifestation as a compulsion to perform shamanic ritual appears as an existential condition, independent of historical circumstances; that is, as something that may happen to a person drawing a shamanic ancestry, irrespectively of the socio-political circumstances within which this bestowal occurs.

Nevertheless, whether Balgan will externalise this bio-energy or repress it depends on historical factors: for instance, the high level of socio-economic instability prevailing in contemporary Tuva has generated a steady flow of people who make sense of their misfortunes in terms of curse affliction; under these social conditions, it is rather unlikely that Balgan will suffer from fits due to being deprived of externalising his bio-energy (through curing), as long as a clientele is available for curing. If Balgan belonged to the generation of Tuvan shamans who underwent political persecution, he would have to repress his hereditary compulsion and desist from shamanic practice or canalise it in a different way – for instance, by means of licking hot iron, as many people with repressed

[3] At another moment of this session, Balgan mentioned that his propensity for shamanising is "genetically transmitted".

shamanic powers did in Yakutiya during the Soviet years (see Vitebsky 1997)[4]. Yet even nowadays there is a form of constraint on full externalisation during kamlaniye: Balgan is unable to act out his hereditary compulsion through a deep trance, as he wishes to do, due to a fear that his urban clientele – unaccustomed to (and perhaps even disapproving of) the shaman's dramatic performances – will think that he is insane (see section 1.7).

We can elicit direct evidence from Balgan's narrative that his bio-energy is devoid of transformative meaning for him. He describes this bio-energy as a force, which he must externalise through curing clients; keeping it within him leads him to experience fits. This force is compulsive; Balgan must externalise it through curing. Now, in the previous two case studies we saw Balgan attempting a psychological cure by means of two symbols to which, as I suggested, his own transition from personal crisis to transformation has been crystallised: these are the süzük-cure and his narrative of Soviet repression, whereby, in my view, he intended to instil in Yuri and Anna respectively the potential for overcoming misfortune[5]. But in Arzhana's case, he instils in her a quality of his own, which is not the product of a personal transformation (or of a working out its transformative potentials). Whereas the süzük-cure and his narrative of repression are symbols of Balgan's transformation from a "historical trauma", the transmission of bio-energy re-enacts an inner, "existential trauma", the conflict between the heavenly and albys tendencies, occurring within Balgan.

I define Balgan's mundane and occult aspects of his shamanic advancement – his symbolic transformation out of ordinary misfortunes and the initial bestowal of bio-energy – as expressions of two different kinds of trauma he underwent, a "historical" and an "existential" trauma respectively. Vitebsky (wherefrom I adopt these two terms) uses "existential trauma" to refer to inevitable experiences during one's lifetime, a characteristic example being the initiation tortures that descendants of shamans undergo (Balgan's terrible visions during childhood is an ideal example of an initiatory torture), and "historical trauma" to refer to events resulting from historical contingency, such as the advent of the Soviet power (2002). Balgan's narratives of revenge against the Soviets, as well as against his friends, reveal that he has managed to overcome historical traumas associated with Soviet repression and post-socialist crisis by resorting to the repertoire of shamanic initiation and thus eliciting a transformative meaning out of these traumas. Yet

[4] The practice of licking hot iron was not unknown to Balgan and several shamans of his Association; yet I never had the chance to observe a shaman performing this. Though I have not inquired about the history of this shamanic practice in Tuva, I suppose that it was being performed by shamans of the pre-Soviet age.

his oscillation between Kara-Kys and the albys as the source of his bio-energy, as revealed in Arzhana's last curing session, shows that an inner conflict which forms the ground of his existential trauma, remains unresolved (even though another tension deriving from this trauma, the terrifying visions of spirits, has been resolved; as he himself said, Balgan no longer experiences terror at the sight of spirits).

In my view, Balgan's narrative of the quality and the origins of his bio-energy is the contemporary counterpart to the Manchurian epos of Nishan-shaman's communications of her initiatory death and rebirth to the client looking for his son's soul (section 3.5). Balgan's representation of Arzhana's body as a vessel where the trajectories of doora and her sünezin converge, and his revelation of the source of his bio-energy must have been for Arzhana a token of his therapeutic effectiveness, not only because Balgan explained her response to the cure in terms of Tuvan idioms (doora – sünezin), that is, idioms intelligible to her, but also because by exposing the deepest part of his own shamanic biography he intended, I think, to establish an intersubjectivity between Arzhana and himself on the parallel basis of a personal (inner) crisis. Just as Nishan's initiatory narrative showed (to the client) that she was able to recover his son's soul because she had undergone – and symbolically resolved – a fragmentation of her person similar to that of the patient's, Balgan's narrative of his bio-energy suggests to Arzhana that he was able to re-integrate her sünezin into her person and cast the doora out of her on the grounds that he has also experienced (and continues to do so) an inner crisis, which he uses for curing. Before (and during) these curing sessions, Arzhana experienced a crisis just as Balgan does (though one of a different sort): she suffered from an inner schism (doora-inflow – sünezin-outflow), just as Balgan experiences a conflict between the albys and heavenly shamanic tendencies that were passed to him (see Figure 2, p. 193). We can now relate this curing session to the previous ones: the exposition of this existential level of his shamanic biography is not simply a process during which Balgan is acting out a conflict; it is at the same time a revelation of the origins of his bio-energy in Kara-Kys, so far, the deepest part of his psychobiography (yet an even deeper source of bio-energy will be revealed below).

Yet, in contrast to his narrative of Soviet repression, there seems to be no sign in his narrative of bio-energy that Balgan has effected a symbolic transformation out of his own inner conflict. Despite its curative effects for Arzhana, the externalisation of bio-

[5] See sections 3.6 and 4.3 respectively.

energy compels Balgan to re-enact – and precipitate – this conflict; he can use his bio-energy to cure his clients, but not himself. Balgan's inner conflict may be resolved one day with the prevalence of one of the two shamanic tendencies competing within him; nevertheless, presently he seems to be too far away from such a resolution. Next, I shall deconstruct his bio-energy in its constituent parts, the albys and heavenly (Kara-Kys) tendencies existing within Balgan. Analysis will proceed along three levels, as they emerge from his narrative: first, the level of Balgan's experience of bio-energy as a special part of his person; second, the level of his relationship with Kara-Kys as the main source of his bio-energy; third, the level of his relationship with the albys, which he will identify as an additional source of bio-energy (see below). In the process, I will present additional information on his shamanic descent (see also section 1.5).

The experience of bio-energy: if Balgan does not externalise his energy, he will fall into fits. He is possessed by a powerful impulse for externalising his bio-energy by passing it to his clients. Suppression of this hereditary impulse is compensated by fits as symptoms of a condition which Vitebsky, in his account of a Yakut shaman's falling into a coma due to desisting from performing kamlaniye in the years of Soviet repression, calls "trance deprivation" (2002: 190-191). Balgan is unable to act out fully this impulse: in a deep trance, being concluded in catalepsy; he thinks that his clients will mistake him for a lunatic. Moreover, he seems to be trapped in a paradox, which is raised by the very nature of his impulse. Assuming that he shed this impulse (by means of passing it to a successor of his, provided that it is possible to shed his impulse in this way), he would be devitalised of this hereditary quality, which sets him apart as a special individual, and he would become a lay (karachal, in Tuvan) person. This is a critical parameter of his inner conflict, which echoes a tension Arzhana experienced as a response to bio-energy: if she is separated from doora, she loses the particularity of her person and becomes again an ordinary individual (section 5.3.2). In a parallel way, if Balgan manages to resolve his inner crisis by casting away his hereditary compulsion, he ceases to be a shaman. But if he continues living with this compulsion, he will be entangled into a lifelong struggle between a need for acting-out and a frustration imposed by social constraints; moreover, he will be forever trapped into a perpetual non-resolution of his conflict, in case he does not achieve a symbolic transformation out of this conflict. The cures he performs will offer a partial relief to this need. Balgan is possessed of a quality, which he must canalise into his clients. Eventually, they (or most of them) will exit from the curing process perhaps completely restored to physical and mental health; by contrast, their curer,

Balgan, will remain caught into a perpetual process of "unfinalised" cure (cf. Vitebsky 1993: 250-253), a cure that partially relieves his hereditary compulsion, yet in doing so, drains him of bio-energy and generates the need for a re-accumulation (by visiting the grave of Kara-kys), perpetuating thus his compulsion for externalising bio-energy (see in the process).

His relationship with Kara-Kys: Balgan inherited this bio-energy from Kara-Kys. By means of this transmission she directs him, as he himself described the control she exerts on him (see section 1.5). A relief from this force can only come by means of its utilisation for curing with a client as the target. Clearly, the relationship between Balgan and Kara-Kys is permeated by his domination by the latter. I suggest that a fusion of respect and fear underlie his submission to Kara-Kys. Undoubtedly, Balgan respects Kara-Kys for having been a profound source of knowledge and curative power to him; to pay respect to her, he yearly worships her in the family's burial place and draws bio-energy from her grave. He also loves her as a mother figure, since she undertook his upbringing until her killing by the Soviets; Balgan used to recall the affluent period of his life close to Kara-Kys, as opposed to the privation experienced close to his parents. But he also fears her, at least after her death, possibly because she might avenge his desisting from practising as a shaman by driving him insane. Balgan's narrative of his bio-energy suggests that he has thought about casting away his bio-energy; he says that trying to get rid of Kara-Kys – that is, the very source of his bio-energy – will do no good to him, because he will fall into fits. It thus appears that the loving mother figure of his childhood has been transformed after death into a venerable and awesome shaman-ancestor who possesses him as a vessel with her energy; and perhaps into a persecuting spirit who may punish him for not externalising bio-energy, by afflicting him with the dark side of this energy, fits.

His relationship with albys: Balgan's reflections on his bio-energy reveal that its origins also involve another source. He oscillates between Kara-Kys and the albys in his attempt to identify the source of bio-energy. At one point, he mentions that he feels something terrible living inside him and claims that it is not he, but the albys who cures. Here the albys aspect of his shamanic person dominates; Balgan is possessed by the albys and acts out this possession in an idiom expressive of his being in the throes of a crisis: by nervously touching the temples of his head with eyes closed. The reader will recall that I had already seen Balgan in this state a couple of times (section 1.8). This behaviour had made me suspect that he was entangled with a terrible spiritual force, though it was

only after this curing session that Balgan revealed (to me) the agent of this disturbance: this is the albys-shaman Shokar, Balgan's great grandfather (and the father of Kara-Kys), about whom Balgan had told me when I first met him. I had thus penetrated, I believe, into the farthest attainable depths of his shamanic psychobiography and recovered an additional source of his bio-energy, which is beyond his mastery. Balgan has managed to master the spirit of Kara-Kys: she instantly descends from heaven and cures the client at his calling (though her mastery is a strenuous task, as his comment that it is difficult to invoke her shows)[6]. In turn, he pays a price to her by being mastered by her: that is, by becoming a vessel for the canalisation of her bio-energy, a vessel subject to punishment with fits, if he abstains from curing. By contrast, he has been unable to master the terrible force of his albys ancestor; the latter overwhelms, even torments him[7]. Balgan's relation with the spirits of Kara-Kys and Shokar as the sources of his bio-energy presents an example which departs from the model of the shaman's relation with his/her helping spirits that Eliade formulated. According to Eliade, a sense in which the shaman differs from other kinds of religious practitioners concerns the control of spirits; whereas other practitioners are possessed by spirits, the shaman is able to control the spirits "without thereby becoming their instrument" (1964: 5-6). This definition is too simplistic to account for the complex interchange of mastery between Balgan and Kara-Kys, while in no way can it account for his torment by Shokar. In curing, Balgan becomes a vessel in which his great shamanic ancestors, Kara-Kys and her father, Shokar, struggle for prevalence. In the process, Kara-Kys seems to prevail; Balgan asserts that it is from her that he draws his shamanic descent. However, Shokar's power is revealed in an acute way: the albys carries Balgan in a rampant, "psychotic flight" across the landscape, until it plunges into the river (I will return to the latter at the end of this section).

The sources of Balgan's bio-energy have now been uncovered. The first (and the closest to him genealogically) is Kara-Kys; the second (and more distant genealogically) is Shokar-kham. His shamanic identity is the product of a fusion between two shamanic tendencies: first, the heavenly tendency which Kara-Kys passed to him and on which he claims prestige and authenticity as a shaman; second, the albys tendency which originates in Shokar, who became a shaman after an attack by an albys. I suggest that it may be the conflict between these two ancestors in order to possess their successor that prevents

[6] See section 1.7.
[7] The reader will recall that, in referring to her relationship with the spirit of her albys grandfather, Oyumaa mentioned that he is tormenting her (section 1.8).

Balgan from working a transformative meaning out of the existential part of his shamanic biography: Balgan must canalise his energy into his clients in order to relieve his inner conflict. His energy is exhausted in the management of this conflict; eventually, the need for energy recharging reappears (due to his hereditary compulsion for externalising bio-energy, as well as due to an unwillingness, I think, to shed a special quality which differentiates him from laymen) and a whole circle of exhaustion and accumulation is initiated anew. For Balgan to keep practising as a shaman the condition holds that this cycle is never to be finalised.

As I argued, Balgan's narrative of his bio-energy shows that he is dominated by Kara-Kys; if he sheds his hereditary faculty, she will afflict him with fits as a punishment. Now one more line of affliction with fits emerges in the light of his distant descent from Shokar. His propensity to fits sends taproots to Shokar's metamorphosis into an albys shaman. According to Balgan, Shokar became a legend of Tuvan shamanism due to the intensity of the trances and fits into which he would plunge during massive séances of cleansing and curing. Now Balgan recaptures this ancestor's demonic experience. To relay his reflections on this experience (he imparted to me the following after Arzhana's last cure):

> There is something inside me, which comes from Shokar-kham. They say that he was *horribly screaming* (*strashno krichal*, in Russian) during kamlaniye. In the village he lived nobody could make sense of what he was daily talking about; but his kamlaniye was powerful. Evil spirits were afraid of him. Each time I remove doora from a client, I am about to fall into hysterics; I feel as if there is an albys within me.

I assume that his growls each time he removes doora from a client, something that no other shaman of his Association did when removing doora, reverberate with the demonic experience of Shokar (if so, Balgan seems to control the tendency for repetition of Shokar's demonic experience due to constraints posed by his clientele).

To complete now my analysis of his shamanic person: his self-designation as a shaman drawing his descent from the heavenly Kara-Kys is for him a source of prestige and authenticity; underneath this, there exists a tendency for repeating the albys-experience of Shokar, who is an additional source of bio-energy for Balgan.

Thus, a three-generational line of succession emerges which involves a parallel passing of the albys and heavenly tendencies to Balgan. Shokar's demonic experiences were passed down to his son, Cherlik (brother of Kara-Kys), appearing as fits, which led him to become an albys shaman also; Balgan considers Cherlik as an additional source of

energy. Reconstituting his shamanic descent in the field, I had difficulties in accounting for what made possible the transition from the albys (Shokar) to the heavenly category (Kara-Kys and Balgan). Balgan solved this problem with an elaboration in cosmological knowledge, whereby due to his mastery of evil spirits Shokar posthumously ascended to heaven to join the supreme deity, Khaiyrakan. Nevertheless, Shokar's heavenly ascent did not cast out the albys, which passed to Balgan, perhaps through Kara-Kys herself. Even though Balgan presented his shamanic descent as a transmission of the heavenly line from Kara-Kys and of a remote albys line from Shokar (and Cherlik), it seems that both the albys and heavenly tendencies were also passed to Shokar's daughter, Kara-Kys (see below). Figure 3 (p. 194) lays out in a schematic fashion the origins of Balgan's shamanic ancestry in the albys that afflicted his great-grandfather (Shokar), his ascent to heaven and his acquisition of the heavenly identity, and the passing of both these lines to Kara-kys and from her to Balgan. It follows that these two tendencies will be passed from Balgan to one (or more) of his descendants (or they might have already passed; Balgan told me that his elder son, a man in his early 30s, appears to have inherited from him the faculty of healing, though he does not officially practise as a shaman). Figure 3 includes also the canalisation of Balgan's bio-energy into Arzhana's body and what follows: the outflow of doora and the return of her sünezin.

The above analysis established that Balgan's shamanic ancestry originates in the albys, which passed through two generations of shamans and now it is implanted within their successor, Balgan. As such, this pattern differs from Vitebsky's premise of the existence in Yakutiya of a "shamanic impulse", whereby the traditional role of the shamans (who were persecuted by the State) was continued in Soviet times through such politically acceptable forms as that of the musician or doctor; that is, that the impulse to shamanic practice which descendants of old shamans felt, assumed cultural forms which were produced by the historical forces of socialism (1997: 9-10). In Balgan's case, the impulse is not transformed into a historically conditioned role: the contrary, the unravelling of his shamanic genealogy leads us back to an old entity which has survived historical change by means of possessing Shokar, Kara-kys and Balgan as vessels and successively passing through each of them. It seems that the impulse of the albys sort is too powerful to be erased from shamanic consciousness by Soviet repression or simply by the passage of time. In addition, Balgan's case shows that the categories of shamans I presented in section 1.5 should rather be treated as typological constructions; the analysis

of Balgan's psychobiography shows that in practice various tendencies, which cut across these categories, may be passed down to a single successor.

My reconstruction of Balgan's shamanic descent in Figure 3 shows that the albys passed to Kara-Kys (and thereafter to Balgan). There is evidence to suggest that Kara-Kys had become a vessel for the albys prior to passing the albys and heavenly tendencies to Balgan: the act of washing her successor into the river after birth, so that he "will not speak the evil language of albys". Having shown that Balgan's shamanic descent originates in the albys, the symbolic meaning of this act becomes manifest: by washing her newborn successor in the river, Kara-Kys intended to cast out of him a shamanic tendency appearing through insanity and fits; and to prevent him from speaking "the evil language of albys", which, I think, refers to the fact that albys-shamans may invoke evil spirits as helpers. The act of Kara-kys possibly suggests that she was also struggling with the albys that her father had passed to her along with the heavenly tendency. An additional meaning of this act could be derived from a psychoanalytic interpretation of shamanic symbolism: Balgan's immersion into the water symbolises his rebirth from his grandmother's womb (cf. Ducey 1976: 214) as a heavenly shaman. By this act Kara-Kys possibly intended to bring about a split between the albys and heavenly tendencies, preserving the heavenly one for her grandson.

Despite this, we see that in the last moments of Arzhana's cure the albys revolts against the act which Kara-Kys had performed in order to cast it out from the infant Balgan! The albys carries Balgan to a frenzied imaginary journey across the landscape until it plunges into the river, just as Balgan did after he was born. The plunging of the albys repeats his infantile washing into the river by Kara-Kys. The act of washing managed to block the overwhelming experience of albys in this session; yet the albys cannot be permanently suppressed or eliminated[8]. The conflict going on within Balgan is expressed through his oscillation between Kara-Kys and the albys as the source of his bio-energy, which, as I noted, is resolved in a precarious assertion of his heavenly shamanic descent. I believe that this resolution functions as a defence against an anxiety over a perpetual struggle between his shaman-ancestors, who target him as the vessel of their expression. Balgan is occasionally entangled in the throes of a demonic experience.

[8] Several months after my departure from Tuva, I received a letter from Arzhana, in which she mentioned that Balgan, whom she had consulted for divination, was in a bad (physical and psychological state) due to a "struggle for survival" (in his own words, "*bor'ba za vyzhivaniye*"), that was going on between the albys and him. I realised that Balgan had survived this struggle, after receiving an email from Galina Lindquist (who visited him in the summer of 2005) that he was normally offering his services.

I assume that he has reflected on this, as his comment that the albys "*fell into the water just as I did*" shows; he himself draws a connection, though quite an obscure one, between the albys and himself. At this point, perhaps it is illuminating to recall Oyumaa, a self-designated albys-shaman, who identified herself with her albys shamanic ancestor: "I am an albys" (section 1.8). Perhaps Balgan is hesitantly moving towards identification with the albys of his ancestry and towards a realisation that the albys who fell into the water in Arzhana's cure and the infant who was washed into the river 55 years ago are the same person. If so, this identification may be completed after (and if) the albys prevails over Kara-Kys. For the time being, his narrative of bio-energy reveals an anxiety, even a fear, that under the reassuring countenance of the heavenly shaman there exists the dark and frightening identity of the albys-shaman.

Yet we would be utterly wrong to conclude that Balgan is locked into a neurotic repetitive compulsion or, even worse, that he is a psychotic. I would suggest that he externalises an inner conflict through what Obeyesekere – in respect of the ecstatic priestesses in Sri Lanka – calls a "myth model": demonic affliction as a culturally constituted idiom for the externalisation of the priestess's inner turmoil, by means of which her behaviour becomes intelligible to her society and also to herself (1980: 100-101)[9]. Still, is Balgan's psychological behaviour intelligible to his society, or at least to the component of ethnic Tuvans? Bearing in mind that most of the ethnic Tuvans who consult Balgan have internalised a Soviet set of ideas and behaviours, we should wonder whether Arzhana, a mature professional – and a highly reserved person, so far as I can tell from my impressions of her – would interpret his existential anxieties, as these were revealed during the last session, as symptoms of psychic illness. In fact, she does not. Far from this, the meaning of Balgan's anxieties is intelligible to her to a certain extent, as her response to my relevant question shows:

> Such people are attacked by a *terrible entity* (*strasnoye sushestvo,* in Russian), albys. A couple of years ago, I consulted a shaman, a woman at her early forties. When she was a child, an albys attacked her, causing fits in her. Her family invited a shaman, who told them that the spirit of an ancestral albys-shaman demanded that the girl shamanize. Finally, the albys and the shaman came to an agreement: the albys would

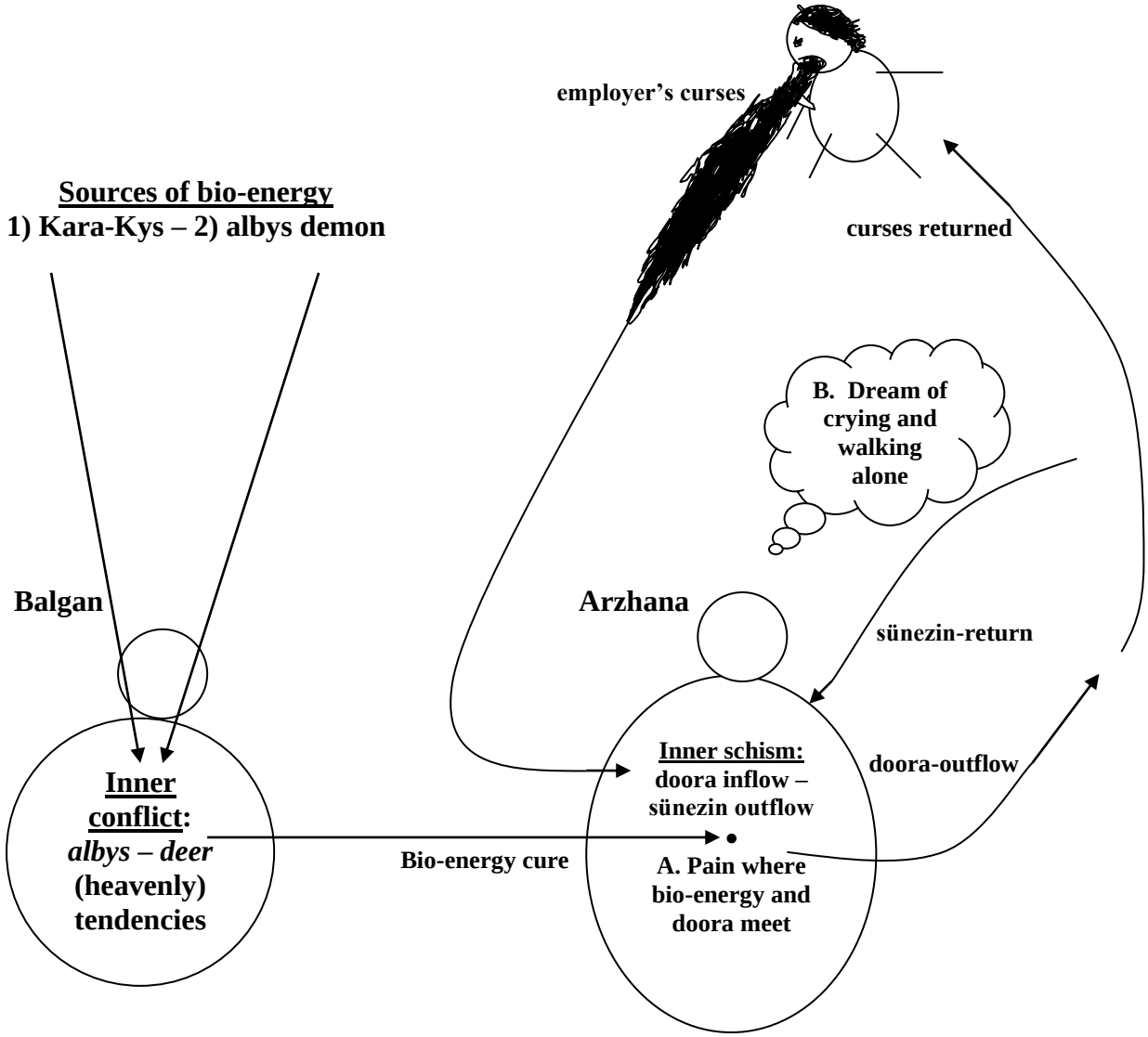
[9] See also Obeyesekere 1985, about the canalisation of affects associated with the psychiatric category of "depression" into Buddhist idioms in Sri Lanka, a process, which he describes as the "work of culture" on the grounds that traumatic psychological experiences are resolved through existential (Buddhist) idioms. More recently, Douglas Hollan has used Obeyesekere's concept of the "work of culture" in his analysis of a ritual practitioner's vicissitudes of working out symbolic meanings from his misfortunes in Toraja (1994).

withdraw its impact from the girl, but it would return when she would become forty years old. This prediction came true[10].

Under this light, Balgan is at the same time acting out an impulse to externalise bio-energy through the idiom of albys-affliction and engaging in a cultural performance. He manipulates the demonic idiom partly for his own needs and partly to impress Arzhana and me; in turn, his performance sustains, perhaps even intensifies, the demonic experience. Through this idiom Balgan communicates his personal experiences to Arzhana in a culturally meaningful way; in turn, this cultural idiom is revitalised and endowed with an experiential immediacy through his performance.

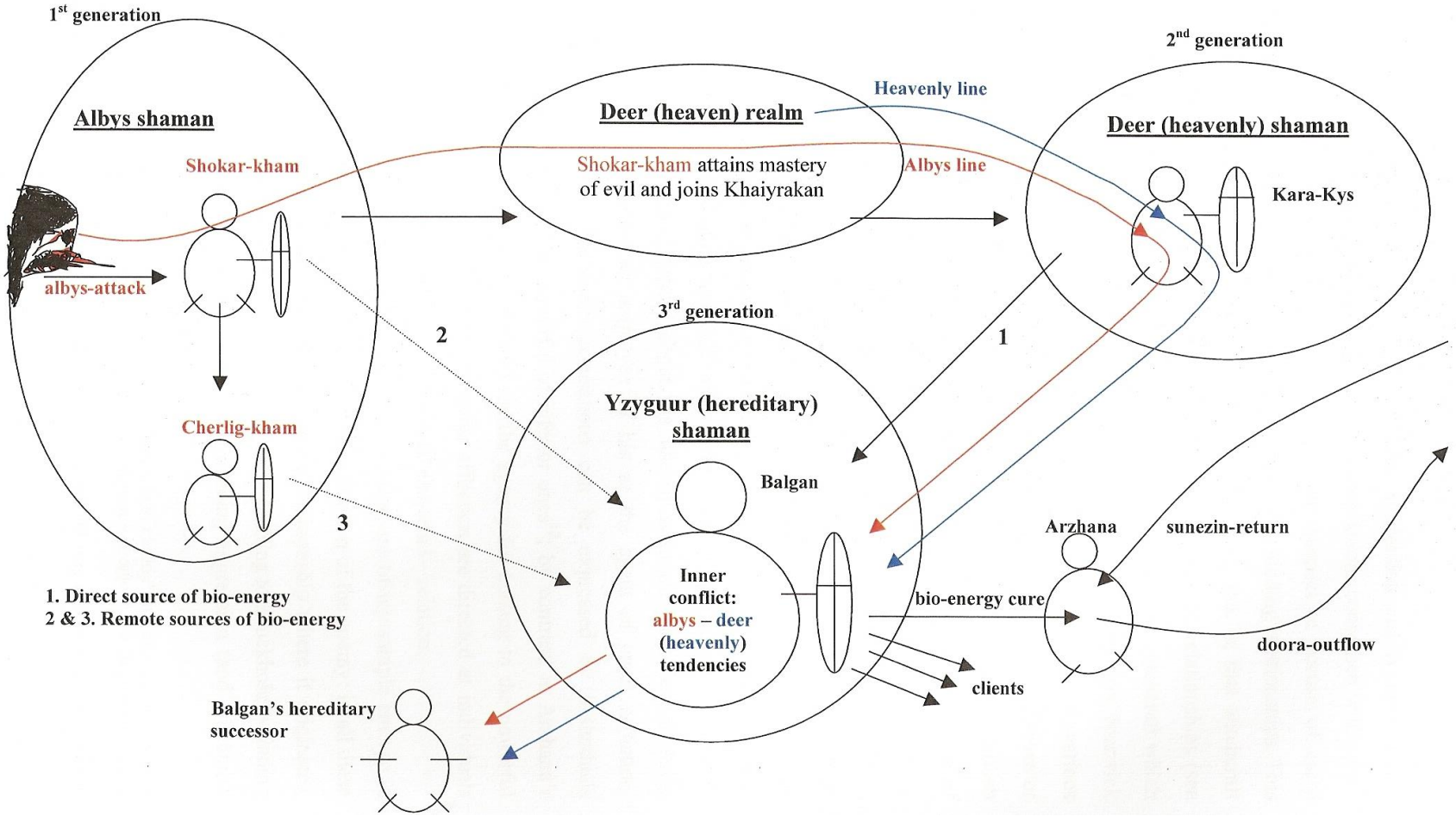
[10] Excerpt taken from the subsequent meetings between Arzhana and me.

Figure 2. Inner crisis as the analogy between Balgan and Arzhana



A. Response to bio-energy at the level of symptom.
B. Response to bio-energy at the level of symbol.

Figure 3. Sources of bio-energy: the conflict of the Ancestors within Balgan



6.2. The ethos of curse paranoia in post-Soviet Tuva: aggression and its repression

A common conclusion emerges from all the consultations concerned with curse-inflicted misfortunes (Table 1, section 2.5): the clients suspect or accuse of curse affliction individuals, with whom they are (or were) caught in binding relationships. This corresponds to an established premise in studies of witchcraft, that is, that witchcraft accusations can function as an instrument for breaking off unwanted relationships (see Douglas 1970: xxi; Macfarlane 1970). In a survey of studies in African witchcraft which treat accusations of witchcraft as indexes of particular kinds of social tension, Marwick cites numerous cases of witchcraft accusations erupting due to tensions in various contexts of relatedness, such as ownership of property and relations between relatives or neighbours (1952: 122-123). The cases of curse affliction in Table 1 allow us to establish a similar correlation between curse accusations and patterns of relatedness as sources of tension. In two of these cases (1 and 13) the accusation occurs in the context of animosity between relatives[11]; in case 1 the client was cursed by a relative during a quarrel, something that indicates that cursing here provided an outlet for the canalisation of hostile and aggressive impulses. In case 15 a legal conflict over ownership of property as a result of marriage break-up leads Anna to accuse her ex-husband of curse affliction. The pattern of curse accusation due to conflict over property appears also in case 9, where two rival herder-groups dispute about the use of pastures. The Central Asian proprietor (case 8) identifies an employee of his as the agent of curse affliction, something that indicates that curse accusations can be expressed by individuals possessing authority against less powerful or inferior ones[12]; by contrast, in Arzhana's case disempowered individuals (employees) ascribe agency for cursing to the powerful (employer). Likewise, Yuri's suspicions of curse affliction are directed at individuals with whom he is involved in a close – personal and professional – relation.

An implication of the finding that the curse accusations of my sample emerge in the context of binding relationships concerns the identification of the enemy: in all these cases the accusation is expressed directly through the relationship where it originates, instead of being canalised against an outside scapegoat. Referring to Kluckhohn's finding that the tendency exists among the Navaho for displacing aggression (and witchcraft accusations whereby aggression is externalised) from a closely related enemy (e.g., a

[11] See Ciekawy and Geschiere 1998: 4-5, on witchcraft as the dark side of kinship in many parts of Africa.
[12] See Riviere 1970: 252, for a similar statement regarding the Shavante people in the Brazilian Amazon; also, Douglas 1970: xxviii, for several African examples.

repressive father-in-law) to a distant witch (scapegoat), Marwick remarks that witchcraft accusations can be either expressed through the relations where they are triggered (as in many African examples) or they can be generated in one relation and expressed in another, as among the Navaho (1952: 123). I adopt here this distinction, because it provides, in my view, a good ground for coming to terms with the clients' strategy of externalising hostile and retaliatory emotions against the enemy in my sample of curse affliction. (The assumption is, I think, valid that most – if not all – of these clients held a grudge against the enemy and intended to retaliate a curse-inflicted misfortune by means of counter-cursing, though nobody would confess this explicitly. For instance, I discern a desire for retaliation in Arzhana's addressing the "god" with the request to punish her ex-employer[13]; in addition to being a rhetorical expression of suffering and interpersonal tension, her request reveals retaliatory impulses).

Accepting Kluckhohn's premise in respect of the Navaho that the cultural pattern of the distant witch sustains social order by allowing the canalisation of repressed intra-group aggression against an external enemy and, therefore, offers an outlet for "hate-satisfaction" (1972: 88-102), it follows that in a culture where the idiom of the witch as scapegoat is non-existent or infrequent (as Tuva), hostilities must be expressed through the same relations within which they are triggered. Indeed, in none of my cases of curse affliction is the curse accusation diverted from the enemy to a scapegoat, if we exclude Balgan's revelations about the shamans who were allegedly commissioned to curse his clients in cases 9 (herders) and 16 (Arzhana). Even so, I presume that revealing the enemy's professional accomplice would not divert the client's retaliatory desire to the latter one; in the most extreme scenario, it would add one more enemy to the client's agenda of revenge (yet we saw that Arzhana's indignation remained focused on her ex-employer, despite the revelations that an Armenian witch and a Buryat woman were allegedly implicated in her misfortunes).

If my sample of curse affliction indicates that (unlike the Navaho) Tuvan culture offers no witches as scapegoats for channelling hostility and drawing "hate-satisfaction", the following problem emerges: we are dealing with a culture where expression of hostile and retaliatory impulses is constrained within the boundaries of a tense relation (instead of being diverted to a scapegoat), yet in eight out of the ten cases of curse affliction in my sample the tension does *not* culminate in overt confrontation, such as physical violence or

[13] See her narrative in section 5.4.

even verbal abuse. The only exceptions to this are cases 1 and 5, where the clients quarrel with their enemies; in the absence of relevant data, I conjecture that these two clients were unable to control their hostile impulses after being confronted with provocative stimuli by the enemy (e.g., verbal abuse) and responded with a counter-stimulus, something that led to the enemy's curses (and perhaps made these persons resort to Balgan in order to have the curses removed and the enemy punished). Furthermore, two striking features emerge from the sample of Table 1. First, not only is violent confrontation avoided, but also the client continues to coexist or cooperate with the suspect(s) of curse affliction: the tension that the proprietor felt due to his suspicions that one of his employees was doing magic against him (case 8) did not force him to oust the enemy from his workplace before or even after he consulted Balgan; likewise, both Yuri and Arzhana maintain relationships (amicable and neutral respectively) with their enemies during a period of suspicions. Second, provocation (repeated acts of bullying) in Arzhana's case does not trigger instantaneous retaliation. It rather results in passivity and withdrawal, reactions that Kluckhohn has also observed for the Navaho (1972: 91); as the two relevant instances of her narrative show (section 5.4), Arzhana responds to the employer's scolding her for an alleged penchant towards jewels and to her accusation of messing with the latter's duties by means of bowing her head and withdrawing from the place of tension.

In my view, these findings lead us to a conclusion very similar to that reached by Obeyesekere regarding the personality type of the individuals who resort to shrines in Sri Lanka in order to retaliate by means of sorcery physical/verbal abuse or intimidation they suffered. Based on a finding that only a very small percentage of those who had practised retaliatory sorcery had previously confronted their enemy through physical or verbal abuse, Obeyesekere concludes that the type of individual resorting to retaliatory sorcery displays a capacity for inner control and restraint of aggressive impulses; that is, it corresponds to persons who are not given to spontaneous violence when confronted with provocative stimuli, but calculate their moves and postpone retaliation through sorcery (1975: 14-15). Likewise, in my sample all the clients pursue a similar strategy towards externalisation of hostility and "hate-satisfaction" (wherever hate against the enemy is involved). In cases 9 (herders) and 16 (Arzhana), although the clients are confronted with such overt kinds of provocation as quarrelsome reactions and intimidation, they actually avoid spontaneous responses that could escalate into physical violence (or even homicide) and strategically plan their retaliation through shamanic counter-cursing.

Instead of being expressed in terms of a *lex talionis* (such as physical abuse), hostility and aggression in these cases are denied instant gratification and transferred to the client's agenda for a future retaliation by means of a delayed practice, shamanic counter-cursing. In section 3.3 I described the latter practice as "ontology of direct returns", in the sense that it yields a desirable outcome – retaliation against the enemy and reversal of an unfavourable situation – more expeditiously than the court, which, therefore, is a typical example of "ontology of delay". But now, if we take into account the time gap between provocative stimulus and resorting to shamanic retaliation against the enemy as a means of ventilating aggression (since, once he has decided to resort to a shaman in order to take revenge on the enemy, the client must calculate the fulfilment of this goal by means of selecting a shaman and arranging a ritual, a procedure that may take several days), it emerges that the shamanic recourse amounts to "ontology of delay", compared to spontaneous physical violence; the latter corresponds to "ontology of direct returns", since it permits instant reduction of tension. We thus conclude that the option of shamanic recourse entails constraints regarding the satisfaction of retaliatory impulses: it may yield expedient punishment (compared to the court), yet for this to happen the client must repress aggressive impulses (which can be instantly satisfied only by means of overt violence) and take steps towards a calculated process leading to retaliation.

Arzhana is a characteristic example of hostility (perhaps even aggression), which was repressed at the critical moments of tension in order to reappear much later; for two years she bears various ignominies in silence (the gossip in the office offered intervals of partial relief from anger amidst a long period of imposed silence), until two different kinds of interaction provided her with the potential for satisfying retaliatory impulses. First, Balgan's performance of kamlaniye and Oyumaa's drawings showing the curses being returned to the enemy (section 5.2); second, the presence of an ethnographer, whose questions about her misfortunes triggered repressed hostility. That is, they provided her with an outlet to vent her spleen against the ex-employer through a narrative infused by indignation (section 5.4). My presence offered to Arzhana an enhanced opportunity to articulate her suspicions and experiences of curse affliction into a narrative drama by means of which she makes sense of and interprets her misfortunes (cf. Mattingly 1998).

All the above leads us to the crux of my argument about a significant incidence of curse accusations and a diffusion of "paranoid" suspicions that enemies bring about misfortune through canalising curse-suffused antipathy/envy or commissioning cursing

by evil shamans. My sample of curse affliction shows the existence in post-socialist Tuva of a personality type who is capable of repressing aggressive impulses directed against an enemy – or, more precisely, who has been socialised in doing so. The latter point adds the dimension of the historical development of the capacity for repressing aggression in Tuva and of the formation of the personality type inherent in my sample; therefore, a detour into the Tuvan past is necessary at this point. Though I did not systematically collect data on aggression and its expression in traditional Tuvan society, the following comment made by the house holder of case 9 (herders), a man at his early 60s, perhaps offers a glimpse into how male Tuvans in pre-Soviet and early Soviet times coped with dispute: "Once, my father was provoked by a man of his age[14] and they had a fight in front of the tent where we lived". Certainly, we cannot make inferences about the frequency of aggression in traditional Tuvan society on the basis of this information, even less so when we do not know what mechanisms of conflict resolution existed at that time; nevertheless, the above testimony – made in a tone which suggested that episodes of aggression were not unusual in the time of this informant's father – shows that provocation and aggression were known to Tuvans in the past.

One could argue that my premise that aggression in Tuva has been repressed by social norms should be confined to the male population, since we have no evidence that Tuvan women were aggressive in the past. In fact, in my sample women prevail both in the positions of accuser and of accused: 4 accusing (1, 12, 15, 16) and 6 accused (1, 5, 8, 12, 13, 16) as opposed to 3 accusing (5, 8, 14) and 3 accused (3, 14, 15) men[15]. Perhaps, this suggests two things: first, women in Tuva tend to express suppressed aggression through curse accusations more often than men (without this implying that the incidence of men who do the same is low); second, agency for curse-inflicted misfortune is more frequently ascribed to women than to men. It may well be that women in Tuva (here I include Russian women also) did not resort to physical violence in the past, but to other means of canalising hostility and aggression, such as verbal abuse or gossip.

In chapters 1 and 3 I discussed aspects of social change in Tuva with reference to the cases of Yuri and Arzhana. In the first case, I showed that Yuri's professional failure due to cooperating with his unreliable friends is a repercussion of post-socialist transition which has generated new, precarious economic actualities (section 3.8). In the second, I

[14] I do not know the reason for this provocation.
[15] This estimation excludes cases 9 and 13, which involve two couples in the position of accusation and one couple in the position of curse affliction.

argued that Arzhana portrays the transformation of Tuva from a clan society to a bureaucratic society during the Sovietisation of Tuva, concluding that the formation of a bureaucratic system led to the revitalisation of pre-Soviet repertoires of the imagination (e.g., shamanic cursing); beneath the façade of Arzhana's professional manners there exist suspicions of curse affliction (section 5.5).

Now, I want to expand these arguments, by shifting the focus to the repercussions of Sovietisation and post-socialism in Tuva from the level of society to the level of the individual: I think that my sample of curse affliction allows the suggestion that patterns which were introduced to Tuva during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, have brought about changes not only at the level of social organisation, but also at the level of individual psychology. In other words, curse accusations are an index not only of social, but also of psychological crisis resulting from a re-socialisation within Soviet and post-Soviet conditions and from repression of hostile or aggressive impulses. Arzhana's case perhaps fits best this argument: she is pushed to the wall under unbearable circumstances, but the norms of conduct in her workplace impose submission to the hierarchy (and, needless to say, repression of hostile impulses). Similar is the problem, which Yuri faces: he believes that his partners embezzle his money, but he seems to be unable to confront them, possibly due to an adherence to the Soviet ideals of friendship and community. Likewise, the Central Asian proprietor seems to be caught into a similar situation: he experiences tension (or even antipathy) toward his employee (this is what his curse accusation against *this* person suggests), but he cannot canalise it against the enemy, possibly due to reasons relating to the sustenance and productivity of his business[16].

From these three cases we can derive a type of person as a formation of Soviet and post-Soviet patterns (see Fitzpatrick 1999; Thompson 2005), characterised by inner control in favour of social norms. Lack of data about the rest of my cases of curse affliction (apart from 1 and 5, where the clients are cursed during a quarrel), does not allow me to suggest the same about all these cases, though I suspect that this is likely, since in none of them does the client report having confronted the enemy. Thus, we can infer that the internalisation of fundamental values and ideals of socialist life, such as community, ethical relations and education (see Yurchak 2006: 8), as well as the need for adaptation to the precarious post-socialist environment, entailed the repression – or, in social rather than psychological terms, the marginalisation – of aggression. From a

[16] An additional reason might be that the enemy was the wife of one of his closest friends, whom I knew.

symbol of masculinity that aggression probably was in the time of the herder's father (see previous page), it has been relegated to the marginal sphere of *kriminaly* (criminals) and *narkomany* (drug addicts) and become a symptom of social dysfunction. Hostile and aggressive impulses are denied expression through overt violence due to social norms; instead, they are externalised on the psychological level, through "paranoid constructions"[17] of curse affliction, as well as through a tendency to resort to shamanic retaliation. On the basis of my sample of curse affliction we can suggest that probably a substantial proportion of curse accusations in contemporary Tuva reflect an impulse for canalising repressed aggression; if this is right, it follows that "paranoid" predispositions of being cursed are endemic within the urban segments of Tuvan society (and perhaps even beyond it). Nevertheless, aggression is canalised through a cultural repertoire of the imagination, curse affliction. Figure 4 (p. 206) represents this canalisation and the streaming of this fraction of curse accusations into the operation of suspicions and accusations of curse affliction in Tuva[18].

At this point, I think it is necessary to explain what I mean with my definition that suspicions and accusations of affliction with curses in Tuva are "paranoid". First, I must clarify that my application of the term "paranoia" to my sample of curse affliction departs from psychiatric definitions of paranoia as a mental disorder involving delusional beliefs, such as fear of being persecuted or being the target of conspiracies – definitions derived from Freud. One may notice a similarity between the persecutory/conspiratorial delusions as symptoms of paranoia (in the psychopathological sense) and the clients' suspicions or convictions of being "persecuted" by an enemy's curses in my sample. This similarity is more conspicuous in Arzhana's case, where two ostensibly unrelated events, the employer's offer of a cup of tea and the entry of the Armenian in the workplace, trigger in her a "paranoid" kind of thinking involving a plan of curse affliction with the complicity of an Armenian witch. Nevertheless, a parallel between behavioural manifestations pertaining to two different cultural contexts does not justify a superimposition of the one into the other (that is, an interpretation of Arzhana's experiences of being cursed on the model of a psychiatrist's paranoid patients), for what matters is the cultural evaluation of the belief in – and of the experience of – curse affliction (see Obeyesekere 1990: 13-14, for a relevant discussion concerning the ecstatic

[17] I adopt this expression from Robert Levy's discussion of paranoia among the Tahitians (see below).
[18] I established this operation in Chapter 2.

experiences of the religious priestesses in Sri Lanka). If Arzhana lived in Vienna in the beginning of the 20th century, she would perhaps gain a respectable position in Freud's caseload of patients, yet, as we saw, for Balgan (and for thousands of other Tuvans, I presume) her experiences are intelligible in accordance with the Tuvan repertoire of cursing.

To turn to the ethnographic literature now, perhaps the most prominent exposition of a culture in terms of "paranoia" is Schwartz's analysis of a culturally institutionalised "paranoid ethos" in Melanesia, which, according to Schwartz, derives from the uncertainty of survival and is manifested through pervasive suspiciousness of sorcery and a concern with hidden meanings underlying surface forms (1973). Earlier, Benedict had described the Dobu peoples in Papa New Guinea in similar terms: a society infested with cut-throat competition over resources and magical spells for acquiring them, where suspiciousness of sorcery "runs to paranoid lengths" (1935: 109). I wonder whether these authors would conceptualise curse accusations in contemporary Tuva as expressions of a "paranoid culture" on the grounds of the pervasive socio-economic angst and competition for jobs (the latter derives from Balgan's divination that the Armenian was commissioned by a Buryat woman who wanted to place her relative in Arzhana's position[19]). In contrast to the above two examples, Levy identifies only momentary "paranoid constructions" of curse suspicions among the Tahitians of the Society Islands; the Tahitians, as he says, are not so much defined by a tendency for projecting hostility to enemies through "paranoid blame", as it happens in other parts of Melanesia, but rather by a tendency for blaming one's own self for misfortune, e.g., due to transgressing religious norms (1973: 498-500).

This raises the question of personal accountability. Assuming that Schwartz, Benedict, and I have not constructed ideal cultures of the "paranoid type"[20], a difference appears between these three examples and Levy's: whereas in the three former examples blame is displaced to an enemy, among the Tahitians it is placed squarely upon one's own self. A discussion of this issue is beyond my purposes here, yet I shall suggest a tentative explanation: it could be that in cultures such as Tuva (and perhaps in Schwartz's and Benedict's examples) the repertoire of curse affliction is more prevalent than one of personal "guilt" ("buruu", in Tuvan) in these contexts of interpersonal tension we are

[19] I will explore the connection between competition for jobs and a high incidence of curse accusations in Tuva in the next section.

[20] See Obeyesekere (1990: 220), for a critique of the tendency for constructing ideal types of *X* or *Y* culture in early ethnography. I suppose that this criticism would be particularly relevant to Benedict's description of the Dobu as pervasively treacherous, suspicious of – and hostile to – each other.

concerned with here; that is, the culturally conditioned response to conflict between two living humans is not one of self-reflection (thoughts that I myself have some responsibility for this tension), but of projection of blame to the other party. By contrast, guilt might prevail in the context of tense relations between the living and the dead.

Notwithstanding that in the three examples from "Pacific" ethnography presented above "paranoia" is articulated with cultural ideologies and practices such as magic and religion, its use implies that some kind of (ill-defined) mental pathology is in effect both at the level of culture and of the individual. This trend has been reversed with a project of de-pathologising paranoia and rendering it useful to anthropological analysis, which was initiated by George Marcus with his premise of a contemporary global "paranoid style" as a plausible mode of social thought, born from the legacy of the cold-war paranoid policies of global conspiracy (1999), and boldly developed by Caroline Humphrey in her discussion of the reincarnation narratives among Buryat Buddhists in Russia and China (2003). Inspired by Marcus's argument about the plausibility of "paranoid social thought" (1999: 2), I turn to the Buryat reincarnation narratives in order to elicit an understanding of "paranoia", which sheds light on the psychological forces underlying curse accusations in Tuva.

Humphrey's analysis is complex, as it rests on abstracting certain features of the paranoid complex in psychoanalysis in order to formulate a concept of "paranoia", which can account for the experience of (Stalinist) political terrorisation and for the (politically) repressed subjects' responses to it; therefore, I shall limit reiteration to those parts which are directly relevant to my discussion. Her analysis revolves around a genre of narratives spoken among the Buryat, in which Stalin's campaign of terror is recast as the inevitable workings of an archetypal figure, the Blue Elephant, which, according to the legend, gave a vow to destroy Buddhism after its efforts of building a Buddhist temple were ignored. Humphrey calls these narratives "paranoic" on the grounds that features characteristic of the paranoid thinking (in a psychoanalytic sense) are also found in them as follows. First, displacement onto external persons and realities (Stalin and the purges) of unconscious or suppressed feelings the Buryat have in themselves regarding their own complicity in the purges; this is expressed in the narratives as a belief that the purges were caused by an excess of bad karma (that is, bad actions) that the Buryat had accumulated in themselves. Second, creation of a supernatural reality permeated by karmic determination (a universe where nothing happens by chance); as a reincarnation of the Blue Elephant, Stalin was destined to destroy Buddhism. Third, a view that this reality (the purges) is interpretable

as one historical epoch within a vast (Buddhist) metaphysical design. The narratives deny the random character of the purges (2003: 176; 185-190).

In my view, these three features of the paranoid complex (as Humphrey adapted them to the reincarnation narratives) – displacement of repressed or unconscious thoughts to other people's minds, creation of a "supernatural" reality where causes and their results are somewhat predetermined by other peoples' actions, and a tendency for explaining this reality in accordance with a certain predisposition of mind – form the psychological basis of almost all the curse accusations in my sample[21]. These clients displace to the enemy's consciousness thoughts which they themselves have generated – that is, a feeling of being persecuted by the enemy – through curse accusations. Their commitment to the repertoire of curse affliction leads them to project internally generated thoughts or affects onto other peoples' intentions; these projections are paranoid, since through them their producer (for instance, Arzhana) displaces to other people a state of affairs which actually concerns herself. This is not to say that these clients deliberately manipulate the idiom of curse accusation in order to express the rancour they feel for particular persons (though this intention is possible or, more specifically, it may coexist with real fears or suspicions of being cursed). Arzhana, to mention an example for which there is sufficient data, is so overwhelmed with suspicions of being cursed that she generates links between ostensibly unrelated events (the employer's offer of a cup of tea and the Armenian's "random" appearance) and perceives treacherousness and malice where a Tuvan indifferent to curse affliction might see only an expression of amicability. That is, Arzhana projects outwards meanings (e.g., hostility) that Freud would look for into her unconscious. Likewise, Yuri is predisposed to perceive a conspiracy under his business partners' invitations to drink. In other words, it may be that these clients are the objects of somebody else's malicious intentions (this is something that we will never know, unless the ex-employer confesses rancorous feelings against Arzhana); nevertheless, their curse accusations mirror, I think, internal paranoid constructions of being the targets of their enemy's malice, as well as hostile impulses against the latter one. In this light, the tension between client and enemy appears to have an additional dimension; the former canalises – consciously or not – hate against the latter one. This is exactly the psychological mechanism of curse accusation: displacement to another person of one's own hostility towards that person, something that

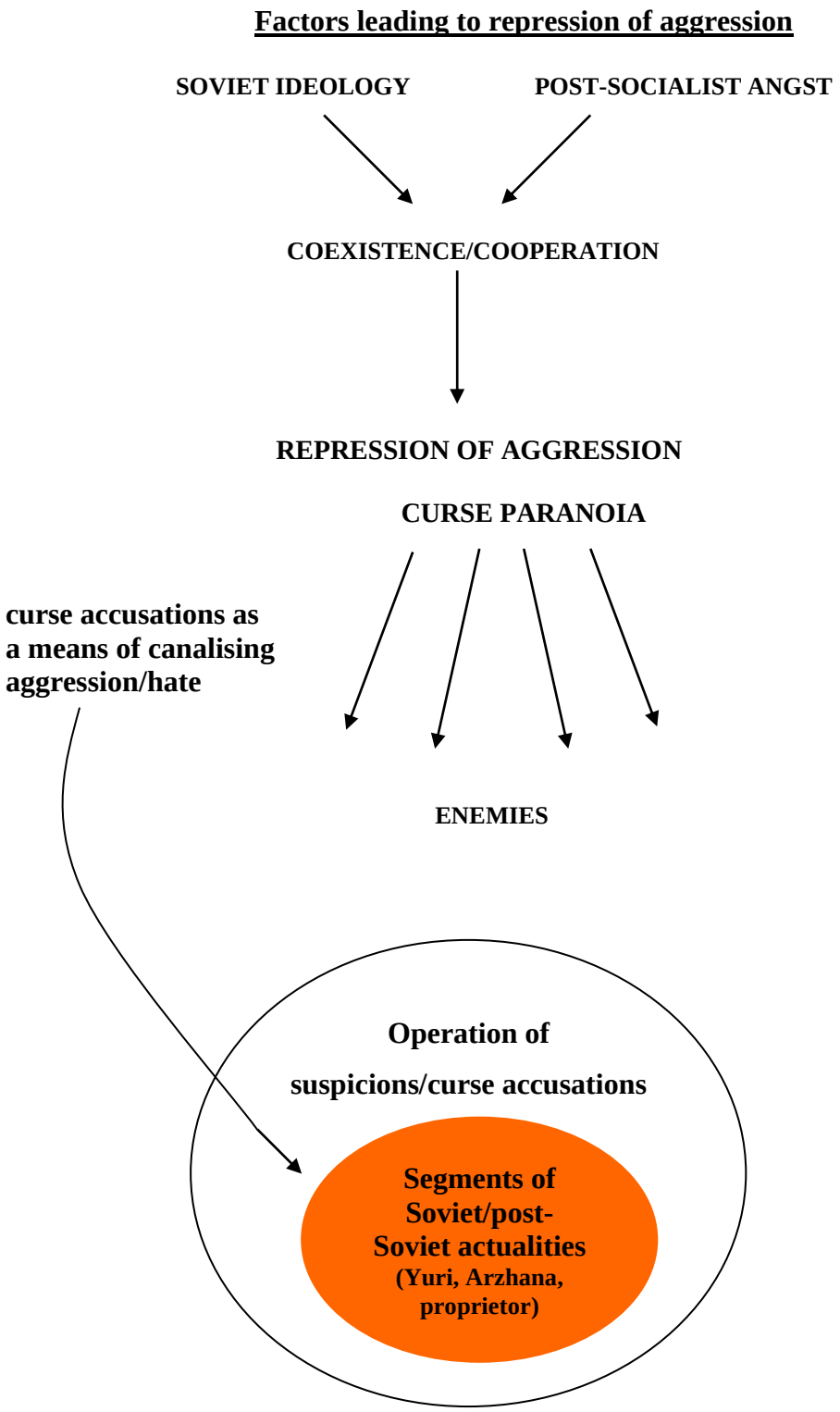
[21] The clients of cases 1, 3 and 5 are excluded from this premise, since their curse accusations are not based on suspicions, but on empirical events of being cursed by the enemy during a quarrel.

the clients in my sample might not be conscious of. As I suggested, these constructions emerge as substitutes for socially repressed aggression.

One product of paranoid constructions is the "supernatural" – or, better, non-empirical – reality in which a causal process of curse affliction and misfortune is set forth against the client. Perhaps Arzhana's case exemplifies this best: during the interaction between the Armenian and the employer, she is caught up in a subjective reality, a creation of her own suspiciousness. Curse affliction as a production of this reality determines the course of her life thereafter, as it destroys her womanhood both at the social and organic levels (loss of partner to a mistress and relapse of her health problem). In this respect, Kapferer's conceptualisation of sorcery as a "web of affective ties or relations" in which the attacking consciousness of the sorcerer and the vulnerability of the victim's body emphasise the human beings' potential to "transcend and transgress the boundaries and space of their own and others' organic individuality" (1997: 1), aptly accounts for the capacity of doora – as an extension of the enemy's curses – to penetrate the victim's body and disrupt its functioning.

Yet in my model of the psychological basis of curse accusation, the affective relation between sorcerer and victim need not exist empirically, but as a subjective reality, itself the client's mental construction (or cursing as empirical fact and subjective experience may run parallel; Arzhana believes that she is cursed, but she may *actually* be cursed). One may argue that a "paranoid" kind of suspiciousness that generates realms of conspiracy (Yuri) and treacherous plans of cursing (Arzhana) cannot but be expressive of pathology both at the individual and social levels, since it may lead to overt conflict with destructive, as we saw for Arzhana, consequences. Though Arzhana's "paranoid constructions" certainly entail a socially disruptive effect for her (loss of job), I would argue that they also entail a creative effect, as they provide a framework for interpreting misfortune in accordance with a cultural repertoire of the imagination, curses; the latter forms the social basis of the ethos of curse paranoia I delineated for Tuva, since it links Arzhana with thousands of other Tuvans whose suspicions and accusations of curse affliction sustain this ethos. This differentiates curse accusations in Tuva as a modality of paranoid social thought from idiosyncratic (and, therefore, arguably pathological) paranoia in western societies.

Figure 4. Curse paranoia: the canalisation of repressed aggression



6.3. The post-socialist context of curse paranoia

In the previous section, I established the social conditions facilitating canalisation of repressed aggression through curse accusations: patterns of relatedness which emerged in Soviet and post-Soviet times (e.g., bureaucratic organisation and private entrepreneurship) impose inner control in favour of social norms; the result is the canalisation of aggressive and hostile impulses through "paranoid constructions" involving suspicions and accusations of curse affliction. Now, I will focus on the post-socialist factors facilitating this canalisation.

A look at the kinds of profession in the 10 cases of clients who suspect or accuse somebody of curse affliction (Table 1) reveals some exceptional features. In three cases (8, 13, 14) the clients hold occupations, which due to the fact that they all are forms of private entrepreneurship could be categorised as "post-socialist": a canteen proprietor, a couple of shop proprietors and an investor respectively. The presence of these cases in my sample of curse affliction is, I think, an expression of anxiety over survival as a repercussion of a major socio-economic transformation which has been taking place in Tuva since 1992: the shift from secure employment in the State sector to private forms of employment and, generally, the potential for private entrepreneurship. Following a trend of reforms permitting privatised economic activity throughout Russia in the early 90s, the Tuvan government introduced a series of reforms on employment in industries and enterprises, a measure that led to the narrowing of the State-sector and to the release of workers, who were absorbed by the private sector (or became unemployed). To relay some figures showing this shift, while in 1990 almost the entire employed population worked in State-enterprises, in 1994 the percentage of the employees in the private sector was approximating the number in the State-sector: 44.2 and 55.8 percent respectively (Anaibin 1998-99: 50). A consequence of these reforms was an increase in unemployment: according to a survey by the Goskomstat (statistical) Department of Tuva for the year 1997, in a population of 138,500 people, a figure that amounts to the population of working age in Tuva, the number of unemployed people (seeking jobs) was 24,600 (17,6%) as opposed to 113,900 people (82,2%), who were employed[22] (Kolmakov 1998: 58).

[22] I do not have any data on the percentage of unemployed people before or after the year 1997. Yet it is possible to suggest that there has been a leap in the percentage of unemployment since the early 90s on the basis of a decline in the number of job vacancies announced by the employment service in Tuva. For instance, 634 vacancies were announced in 1992, only 38 in 1995 and 26 in 1996 (Anaibin 1998-99: 52).

Taking into account the above difficulties prevailing in the labour market of Tuva, as well as the possibility of failure associated with private entrepreneurship and the frustrations resulting from it, it seems likely that individuals faced with uncertainty in Tuva may employ a particular repertoire for making sense of misfortunes, namely curse affliction. On the basis of the above data, we can suggest that the withdrawal of the State from the daily lives of great numbers of Tuvans – as this is evident from the release of a mass of employees from the State-sector, traditionally a source of economic stability and still the most desirable resource for employment (see below) – and the inability of the State to provide adequate social protection to those faced with uncertainty have led (or contributed) to the emergence of new forms of anxiety. In certain cases, such as the three above ones, this "state of emergency" (cf. Gregory 2006) triggers canalisation of hostile impulses through suspicions and accusations of curse affliction.

In my view, these three cases (8, 13, 14) indicate that in post-Soviet Tuva signs of a socio-economic transformation affecting occupations vulnerable to the danger of bankruptcy in a privatised market have appeared, a social pattern discussed by Laurel Kendall regarding the urban clientele of shamans in Seoul. According to Kendall, industrialisation and urbanisation starting in the 1960s – the Korean State's program to transform an agricultural society into "a highly urbanised, newly industrialised country in the space of one generation" – led to the emergence of a class of petty capitalist entrepreneurs, who engage in high-risk enterprises within a new and precarious economic domain (1996: 514-16). A sample of clients who consulted shamans – either those of the commercial shrines located in the mountains surrounding Seoul or independent shamans – is instructive in this respect: 15 of 18 clients engaged in some form of small business such as shop proprietors and restaurateurs (just like cases 8 and 13 in Table 1), whereas conspicuously absent from this sample were "white-collar" professionals (civil servants and salaried corporate workers), that is, households enjoying the relative stability offered by employment in the corporate or civil sector[23] (1996: 518). Just as in cases 8, 13 and 14 from Table 1, members of a Korean petty bourgeoisie consult shamans in their attempts to cope with precariousness and financial disaster (making allowance for the fact that,

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This decline in the number of jobs available in conjunction with the narrowing of the State-sector indicates that the number of unemployed people is constantly rising.

[23] This is not to say that people from the higher ranks of Korean society do not consult shamans. Kendall relays shamans' rumours about rituals sponsored by the wives of white-collar workers, wanting to achieve their husbands' promotion in this way, or even by high monopolists themselves (1996: 518). This reminds us of Balgan's disclosure that politicians employ him as a protection against the curses cast against them by the shamans of their political opponents (section 1.8).

whereas in Kendall's sample the clients ascribe their misfortunes to divine displeasure, the clients of my sample ascribe their misfortunes to curse affliction by an enemy). The existence of these three cases among the sample of consultations about curse affliction is possibly a marker of the gradual formation in Tuvan society of a category of petty entrepreneurs. If this is right, it follows that the potential for entrepreneurship would attract people seeking prosperity (like Yuri and the Central Asian man in my sample); taking into account the huge number of private enterprises in Tuva[24] and the high levels of unemployment due to stoppage or bankruptcy of many of these enterprises (Anaibin 1998-99: 55), we could expect a rise in the incidence of curse accusations. This premise is tentative, though based on empirical data (cases 8, 13, 14).

In addition to the above three cases, my sample includes three cases (9, 15, 16) where conflict is a repercussion of privatisation. Cases 9 (dispute between herders over land ownership) and 15 (conflict between Anna and her ex-husband over property ownership) could only occur in the context of privatised land and property; such conflicts could not in principle erupt in this form under the conditions of State-owned property, which prevailed in the Soviet period. Case 9 is reminiscent of Balgan's mention that in pre-Soviet times "tribes" competed with each other for territorial control: in both contexts claims on land are raised; yet, whereas in pre-Soviet times such contests affected the "tribe", clan or wider kin group as a whole, nowadays, as case 9 shows, disputes over land affect the economy of separate households, an effect of the transition from clan to individualised economy.

My sample then contains six cases of curse accusation concomitant with the post-socialist transition (8, 13, 14, 9, 15, 16). There remain four cases (1, 3, 5, 12), which I classify separately due to lack of data suggesting a post-socialist element in them; they could perhaps have occurred in Soviet times also. In my view, the presence of these "post-socialist" cases in my sample strongly suggests a significant rise in the incidence of curse accusations due to socio-economic angst and frustrations in the post-1990 period. Based on these cases, we can formulate the following (tentative) argument: the expansion of the privatised labour market in conjunction with severe competition for jobs, as well as the emergence of conflict over freshly privatised property would entail frustration and

[24] In the 1st of January 1998 there existed 4, 207 private enterprises in Tuva (Kolmakov 1998: 47). I do not have any further data on these enterprises, but if we make the logical assumption that an enterprise employs a certain number of workers (ranging from the members of a household to an extended unit), it follows that the lives of several thousands of Tuvans depend on the wellbeing of these enterprises.

anxiety for individuals experiencing difficulties (or having failed) in their attempts to realise their goals of economic/professional advancement or stability. Taking into account the increasing numbers of Tuvans facing such tensions and frustrations and given the availability of the idiom of curse affliction in Tuvan culture, we could expect a corresponding increase in the incidence of curse accusations. That is, the conclusion that these six cases derive from post-socialist kinds of anxiety leads us to infer that these cases might have been absent from my sample, if socio-economic stability had prevailed in Tuva.

Case 16 (Arzhana's conflict with her employer) merits special attention. At first glance, there seems to be nothing in Arzhana's case to suggest that this conflict could have been also triggered by a post-socialist factor, e.g., privatisation and the subsequent rise in unemployment; based on her narrative of curse affliction in the office, we can infer that her conflict with her ex-employer could have occurred during the Soviet period also. Nonetheless, the possible post-socialist roots of this conflict emerge, if we recall Balgan's explanation of why Arzhana lost her job: the Buryat woman, who commissioned the Armenian witch in order to make Arzhana lose her position and to *place a relative of hers in this position*. This explanation offers a glimpse of tensions permeating contemporary Tuvan life, such as aspiration of securing a white-collar job and suspicions of curse affliction by individuals coveting this job (in case of job-failure), something that resonates with statistical data on competition for jobs in Tuva. To mention a relevant figure, in 1996 competition for a single vacancy in enterprises and organisations reached 376 people per job, while positions in administration and management are considered as the most prestigious ones (Anaibin 1998-99: 48-49). Thus, Balgan's explanation reflects an operation of anxiety flourishing in the urban contexts of Tuva, competitiveness for a very limited number of positions amidst a labour market handicapped by unemployment and a deficient system of social protection.

Now, I would like to turn to an impressive article by Obeyesekere, in which he explores the rise of supernaturalism in modern Sri Lanka (1977). The article deals with a phenomenon, which has assumed mass proportions in urban Sri Lanka since 1940 – the ascendancy of the cult of the god Skanda at the Kataragama shrine. Briefly, the worship of Skanda is not new to Sri Lankan culture; it dates back to at least the 15th century, when Skanda appears as the god of war and protector of the Kandyan kingdom, while in the following three centuries his popularity takes a sharp upturn, as the Kandyan kings give their patronage to his cult and devotees appeal to him in Kataragama amidst internecine

war between rival kingdoms and resistance against the colonial power. The imposition of Pax Britannica around 1815 led to a period of decline in the popularity of the god and to the abandonment of his shrine, a development that the author attributes to the demoralisation of the people and their felt lack of ability to confront the British (1977: 383-386).

Presenting ample documentation about the profile of the clients propitiating this shrine, Obeyesekere argues that the post-1940s rise in the popularity of Skanda (an incremental process that by early 1970s had culminated into at least 500,000 pilgrims during the fifteen-day period of the annual festival only!) is a response to socio-economic frustrations associated with modernisation: urbanisation, industrialisation, but principally, mass education and the near-impossibility of finding a white-collar job. According to this, the increase in literacy means that practically all educated Sri Lankans aspire to a white-collar position and, subsequently, to promotion through the bureaucratic system; yet this is largely unattainable, not only due to scarcity of such positions, but also due to a phenomenon observable, according to Obeyesekere, in many developing countries: even though there exists a rational blueprint – imported from the West – for the achievement of a goal (e.g. a white-collar job), in fact success depends on the patronage of elitist ranks vested with political power, something unrealistic for all those unable to access the elite. Thus, when the goal is well defined, but the means for its realisation hazy, the actor would experience frustration and/or seek to realise the goal through traditional pathways. Skanda is ideally suited for this purpose due to his bravery, resourcefulness and ability in overcoming difficult obstacles – traits traditionally ascribed to him; hence, the resurgence of his cult in modern Sri Lanka amounts to an adoption of these features to a changing society, to commissioning the deity's aid in order to achieve professional and status advancement. For people afflicted with anxiety and/or led by ambition, Skanda stands as a father figure, who, contrary to the other deities of Sri Lanka, will even abjure his moral sense in order to help his faithful devotee. For this, Skanda is, as Obeyesekere writes, "*par excellence* the god of the politician, the businessmen and big-time crooks in the city of Colombo" (1977: 387-390; 383).

An explicit analogy emerges between the cases of Tuva and Sri Lanka: resurgence of an element in the cultural repertoire – Skanda in Sri Lanka, curse accusation in Tuva – as a response to socio-economic change. That is, we can discern in post-Soviet Tuva a pattern of psycho-cultural response to socio-economic change, which is similar to the example of Skanda: in the latter case, a dormant deity is revived and commissioned to

realise the supplicant's aspiration of finding a white-collar job (or to aid the white-collar worker in his efforts for professional advancement); likewise, in Tuva a pre-Soviet repertoire of the imagination, namely curse affliction, is revived and adapted to the post-socialist environment in order to make sense of misfortune deriving from professional/economic precariousness, as well as to explain success in finding a job in the public sector. This analogy becomes closer, if we assume that Balgan's explanation of why Arzhana lost her job reflects a Tuvan response to unemployment: just as educated Sri Lankans supplicate Skanda in order to find a white-collar job (or even enlist Skanda in sorcery rituals against rival white-collar workers), people in Tuva resort to various shamans and magicians when confronted with the challenges and complexities of modernisation; that is, in order to gain a supernaturally granted advantage in situations of competition or to deprive somebody else of her job. If this is so, Benedict's comment that magic is vital for the Dobu within the context of cut-throat competition[25] is particularly relevant for the Tuvan case also.

In my view, the three cases of ethnic Tuvans (9, 13, 16) from the "post-socialist" segment of the sample of curse affliction (cases 8, 13, 14, 9, 15, 16) are suggestive of a revival of a pre-Soviet repertoire within the operation of suspicions and accusations of curse affliction in Tuva. That is, these three clients do not simply contribute to a flow of curse accusations – as the cases of non-ethnic Tuvans (8, 14, 15) do[26]; more importantly, they revive a specific idiom through which intertribal conflict was conducted in the pre-Soviet age[27], in order to render meaningful tense or ambiguous interpersonal relations occurring in the contexts of conflict over land-use (9), kinship (13) and professional hierarchy (16). These clients could be seen as unwitting "shamanic revivalists" (though their revival differs from the public revivalist performances comprising shamans and audiences). Their suspicions and accusations contribute to the making of a dark operation consisting of paranoid constructions of curse affliction, which proliferates under the observable level of public life and is crystallised in Associations and practitioners specialising in its management. Nonetheless, as with local neo-shamanism, this revival

[25] See previous section.
[26] One may wonder why I do not conceptualise the curse accusations of the Central Asian client (case 8) and of the two Russians, Yuri and Anna (cases 14 and 15), as a revival of a pre-Soviet repertoire, just as I did for the three cases of ethnic Tuvans. Though I do not deny the possibility of revival in these cases, I do not have any data about the history of cursing in their socio-economic contexts (Russian and Central Asian) which would enable me to draw connections between pre-Soviet and post-Soviet forms of cursing in their cases.
[27] See section 1.1.

through a movement of paranoid social thought which runs parallel to conventional and artistic expositions of shamanic practice enacted at the level of surface reality, is not so much a repetition, but a modified form of its pre-Soviet prototype (the intertribal curse accusations). It seems as though the revived form of curse affliction has absorbed concerns reflecting the contemporary zeitgeist of Tuva: doora, the morbid entity born out of a curse, may now lie in ambush inside one's shop or office. In this form, it perhaps symbolises a common fear among people in Tuva, like Yuri and Arzhana, that danger lurks behind such ostensibly benevolent intentions, as an invitation to drink vodka with friends or an offer of a cup of tea.

Epilogue – The future of curse paranoia in Tuva

I would like to close this thesis with some afterthoughts about the conditions of non-resolution in which Balgan (as well as other shamans in his Association) and Tuvan society are presently involved and to consider the possibility of an interaction, a double feedback, between them, which will sustain and augment the operation of suspicions and accusations of curse affliction. This experiment is inconclusive, since the lives of Balgan and of his clients are open-ended and thus subject to historical contingency: Balgan may continue enriching his symbol-system with emblems of symbolic transformation out of ordinary misfortunes (some of these misfortunes being of a post-socialist nature), which he will use to relieve his clients' suffering; the latter may continue consulting him for curse removals, particularly so, I presume, if socio-economic precariousness in Tuva persists. Perhaps, curse affliction offers a further link between Balgan and his society (beyond divination and the psychopomp rituals Balgan performs). Under social pressures related both to Soviet and post-Soviet bureaucratic and economic actualities, Tuvans whose living depends on these actualities sometimes produce paranoid constructions of being cursed, that is, they mentally rework a cultural repertoire of the imagination and expose it (in a form adapted to modern socio-economic circumstances) to a professional virtuoso of the repertoire of cursing, Balgan. Through divination Balgan validates the client's suspicions and accusations, cultivating the latter's tendency for suspiciousness and introducing new fields of tension and curse-inflicted complexity as a means of regulating suspiciousness and finally reducing it by means of healing and retaliation; to mention an example, the divination for Arzhana set off from a validation of her suspicions to reveal a hidden mechanism of cursing against her, which extended beyond the confines of her workplace and involved enemies unknown to her, who (allegedly) coveted her position.

This example suggests that Balgan's process of divination and cure temporarily releases the client from suspicions of curse affliction but, more widely, it may also create the conditions for an intensification of suspiciousness in the long term. His compulsion for externalising bio-energy possibly leads Balgan to prolong or intensify the healing interaction with the client (an interaction that has healing effects for Balgan also), by means of pulling strands from the client's narrative of curse affliction and cultivating them to "paranoid" lengths. In doing so, Balgan produces (or develops) bodies and persons sensitive to curse affliction, which, I predict, will keep conveying their paranoid constructions (being more complex each time) to the master of curse paranoia who will in

turn keep canalising his bio-energy into them in order to treat them for curse affliction and this way to reduce their tension and suspicions; Balgan will keep reducing his clients' tension, yet his divinations will probably cultivate new dimensions of the contemporary operation of curse paranoia. His divinations and cures amount to a paranoid epistemology, a set of practices designed to convert the client's suspicions into empirical facts; as we saw in Arzhana's case, Balgan converted into bodily experiences her suspicions of curse affliction by means of passing bio-energy to her and performing kamlaniye. The transformation that the performance of kamlaniye has undergone from a practice specially designed to alter – through shamanic trance – the patient's or the audience's state of mind into one specially designed to render experientially real what appears in the form of suspicions reflects, I think, a change in the Tuvan person, concomitant with socio-economic changes throughout the 20th century: the introduction of Soviet and post-socialist actualities of togetherness and cooperation have actually engendered dissociation, repression of hostile thoughts and impulses, pretension, and a paranoid concern with a friend's or co-worker's submerged intentions – tensions which Balgan attempts to reduce in the context of his consultations. Arzhana and all the other clients whom we met in this thesis are part of a shamanic complex in contemporary Tuva, which, I believe, will keep recruiting new members for as long as socio-economic angst prevails, and will keep producing increasingly elaborate patterns of curse accusation under Balgan's management of his clients' suspicions. Drawing on the practices of Balgan, this thesis concentrated on a limited, though (I believe) dynamically evolving, part of the shaman's ritual repertoire in the post-Soviet age: in his retaliatory (counter-cursing) role, the shaman is the engineer of "paranoid" suspiciousness, which he may intensify as much as reduce in his interactions with his clients.

Appendix 1. The healing algysh for Arzhana

Ooi-Ooi[1], tandy-synnar eeleri,
Spirits of the taiga,

Taiga-cynnar eeleri, Ooi-Ooi,
Spirits of the taiga,

Khemner suglar eeleri, Ooi-Ooi,
Spirits of rivers and waters,

Kholder suglar eeleri, Ooi-Ooi,
Spirits of lakes and waters,

Aryg suglar, Kara syglar,
Pure waters, spring waters,

Arzhaan syglar eeleri, Ooi-Ooi,
Spirits of arzhaan waters,

Tandy-Uula, ulug taiga,
Big taiga, Tandy-Yyla,

Taigalarnyn eeleri,
Spirits of the taigas,

Chedy-Kholdyn, Cheder-Kholdyn eeleri,
Spirits of Chedy and Cheder lakes,

Arzhana dep attyg yryynarny, Ooi-Ooi,
Your daughter, (called) Arzhana,

Aaryg-arzhyyn, doorazyn,
Illness and doora,

Chailadynar, eegidiner,
Take away illness and doora, make her recover,

Chash-la tөlde khinchek kaidal,
She hasn't done anything wrong

Askyn-kezhiin beerlediner, Ooi-Ooi,
Bring here happiness for her

Khondergeiler, Shokar-taiga,
Places of Khondergei and Shokar-taiga

[1] This has the meaning of invoking the spirits.

Koshkarlygnyn, ezirlignyn eeleri,
Spirits of the goat and the eagle,

Bashky-Tandy eeleri,
Spirits of the top of taiga-mountains,

Bai-la Taiga, Mongun-Taiga eeleri, Ooi-Ooi,
Spirits of Bai-la Taiga and Mongun-Taiga,

Ak-la Dovurak, Kara-Dashtyn,
Spirits of Ak-Dovurak and Kara-Dashtin,

Khemchik-Khemnin, Aksy-Barlyk eeleri, Ooi-Ooi,
Spirits of Khemchik-Khemnin and Aksy-Barlyk,

Arzhana-kystyn, ondyr chechee,
The great blossom of that girl, Arzhana,

Arzhana-telzin, өzer bolzun,
Let this flower (Arzhana) blossom, let it grow,

Arzhana-kystyn, aaryg-arzhyy
The illness of that girl, Arzhana,

Chider bolzun, seriir bolzun, Ooi-Ooi,
Let illness disappear, let her recover,

Donga bazhin deeskinmezin,
Do not let her head become dizzy,

Doorazy adyrlyzyn,
Let doora go away,

Degiit durgen,
As quickly as possible,

Doorazyndan adyrlyzyn, Ooi-Ooi,
Let her escape from doora,

Өsken chyrty Khondergeiden,
From the motherland of Khondergei, where she grew up,

Sunezini eglip kelzin,
Let her soul come back,

Өndyr charash chechek yshkash,
Like the very beautiful flower,

Segip chorui baar bolzun Ooi-Ooi,
Let her (keep on) blossoming,

Sunezinin surup keldim,
I have come to retrieve (to look for) her soul,

Ulug-Ugum, kara-kuskun,
My great ancestor, the black crow,

Ulug-eeren, Adyg-eeren,
Big spirit-helper, spirit-helper of the Bear,

Arygladym, arygladym,
I have purified,

Artysh-bile arygladym,
I have purified with artysh,

Düngürledim, düngürledim,
I have drummed,

Düngür-bile arygladym,
I have purified with the drum,

Buyan-kezhii, aas-kezhii,
Happiness and good luck,

Aalynche eglip kelzin, Ooi-Ooi,
Let happiness come back to her home,

Kargysh-chatka Arzhanaten-ne,
Kargysh-chatka from Arzhana,

Adyrylgash yraar bolzun,
Let them (kargysh-chatka) leave her and go far away,

Aas-dyl, aaryg-arzhyyk,
Evil words and illness,

Anyyak-chash Arzhanaten-ne yrazhynam,
Let these things go away from Arzhana, who is so young,

Deerde Khaiyrakan, өrsheezinde,
In the upper sky, Khaiyrakan,

Aldyn Khunum, Aidyn-Aiym,
My golden sun, my bright moon,

Arzhana kyshka kezhik choldan,
Happiness for the girl, Arzhana

Buyan kezhiin khaiyrlazyn,
Let happiness flourish (for Arzhana),

Amydyral-churtalgazy,
Life,

Ak-la sut-deg,
White as milk,

Ak-la chorzun,
Let (life) be white,

Aas-kezhii kelir bolzun, Ooi-Ooi,
Let her happiness come here,

Azhi-tөlden,
Children,

Tөruur bolzun,
Let her give birth,

Aas kezhiktig,
With happiness,

Churttaar bolzun,
Let her live with happiness,

Kydyg cherden kelgen chuve,
Something that has come from the old place (backwood),

Kydyg chөrzhe chorui bardy,
It has gone away to that place,

Aar iinden kelgen chuve,
Something that has come from the remote slope of a mountain,

Aar inde chorui bardy өrsheezinem,
It has gone back to the slope of that mountain[2],

Eki chuve chedip keldi,
Good things have come here,

Echizinde artar bolzun, Ooi-Ooi,
Let them stay here forever,

Aas-kezhik, kezhik-cholu,
Happiness and good luck,

[2] The last four verses refer to Balgan's divination that Arzhana had also been cursed by a woman many years ago, when she was living in a village. Balgan divined this in section 5.2. I have not included this event in Arzhana's case study, because it is irrelevant to her curse accusations against her ex-employer.

Alyzyn da artar bolzun,
Let these stay forever

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